

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust  
Finance Committee**

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance Committee held in Thomas Alleyne's High School, on Wednesday, 5 February 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

**163. 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 options. (See Minute 169).

**164. Minutes:**

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance committee held on 5 December 2019 had been previously circulated and taken as read.

It was resolved –

That the minutes be received and approved.

**165. Matter Arising:**

External Audit (Minute 153) refers)

The CFO reported that the annual report and financial statements had been submitted to the ESFA by the agreed submission date. They had been received and noted without comment.

The chair of the trust board further reported that it was necessary to re-appoint an external auditor as the 3-year contract had now ceased. He reminded trustees that it was the ULT members who appointed the external auditor. Discussion took place and it was agreed that tenders should be sought from an appropriate company to undertake the external audit.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CFO be requested to arrange for tenders to be sought and that he should liaise with the chair of the trust board regarding companies from whom they should be sought.
- ii) That the clerk be requested to contact ULT members to update them regarding the process for appointing an external auditor and formal approval would be sought at the next members' meeting.

## **166. Associate Membership – Richard Clarke First School:**

The CEO reported that, together with the chair of the trust board, they were to meet shortly with the governing body of Richard Clarke First School to further discuss the school becoming a permanent member of the ULT. Before doing so, governors were seeking clarification around several issues, including the top slice, teaching assistant contracts and the school's endowment fund. Governors would want this fund to remain outside of the control of the ULT.

It was resolved –

That trustees fully support the discussions to encourage the school to become a permanent member of the ULT.

## **167. Free School:**

The chair of the trust board confirmed that, further to discussions at a recent meeting of the trust board, approval had been given from the DfE for the £25k to meet legal costs and approval was expected shortly for the £65K to develop the school. Everything was continuing on track for the school to open in September 2021.

It was resolved –

That the update on the new school be noted.

## **168. ULT Finance Report:**

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

### **a) External Audit – ULT Action Plan**

A draft action plan to address issues identified in the external audit was circulated and the chief finance officer went through the detail of it. The action plan included proposals and timelines for meeting auditor recommendations for the following matters:

- School credit card transactions
- Use of school funds for gifts and hospitality
- Review of ULT policies
- Tendering process
- ULT website and governance structure

Discussion followed and trustees recognised the importance of ensuring that all recommendations of the external auditor be addressed as appropriate. They also identified a need to ensure that regular budget monitoring was undertaken in accordance with national guidance.

It was resolved –

- i) That the external audit action plan be received and approved as presented, with thanks to the CFO.
- ii) That a review of arrangements for regular monitoring of the ULT/ school budgets be undertaken at the next meeting and that this matter be included on the agenda.

b) School CIF Bids 2020/21

The CFO confirmed that, as reported at the previous meeting, CIF bids had been submitted on behalf of all schools with the exception of Ryecroft Middle School. Outcomes were expected within the next few months.

c) 6 Month Review

The CFO reported that the 6-month review was not yet ready but would be circulated as soon as it was available for full discussion at the next meeting. The CFO further reported that schools were starting to look at next year's budgets based on projected numbers and financial information received from the ESFA. With the exception of All Saints School the anticipated budgets looked favourable although it was necessary to be mindful that the recommended teacher salary increases would no longer be supported by the teacher pay grant.

It was resolved –

That issues around teaching staff and leadership salaries be discussed further when next considering the Pay policy.

d) ULT Budget

The CFO circulated a report to show ULT income 2020/21 and top slice implications based on various percentages. Discussion followed and trustees recognised that the current level of top slice funding could not be sustained without changes made to the central services provided or income received. The CEO and CFO reported that they were looking at all central services and identifying others that could be included in the future and that a report would be prepared for discussion at a future meeting. The chair of the trust board also requested that consideration be given to including governor support as a service level agreement funded centrally, as raised at the recent meeting of the school representation board.

The CEO further reported that she was also undertaking an analysis of school staffing levels and asking headteachers to keep her informed of impending staff changes so that other options could be explored before posts were advertised.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CEO and CFO be requested to provide a report for the next meeting to show the financial impact for schools through an extension of centrally funded services, which could offset any increase in the level of the top slice.
- ii) That trustees fully support the review being undertaken by the CEO of staff recruitment, particularly as school numbers fall, and that headteachers should inform the CEO of any anticipated or actual staff changes before any further action is taken.

e) School Resource Management Self-Assessment Checklist

The CFO confirmed that the checklist had been completed and returned as previously discussed. Discussion followed and trustees noted that the information contained in the checklist would be helpful for individual local governing boards to discuss appropriate issues and would also help to identify future trends.

## **169. ULT Redundancy Consultation:**

The CEO reminded trustees that, following the recent meeting of the trust board, the revised redundancy scheme would be following a two-stage process. An initial letter would be sent to all staff informing them of the outcome of the consultation process asking them to accept, or not, the change to the redundancy benefits. A second letter would then be sent to any staff not responding. Copies of both letters were circulated and the CEO outlined the process for distributing the letters and for receiving responses. Formal approval was to be sought at the meeting of the trust board to be held on 12 February with letters then distributed to all staff the following morning.

It was resolved –

- i) That the first letter to staff be revised further to make clear that changes to the redundancy benefits were being made to secure educational provision across the ULT and protect jobs.
- ii) That a recommendation be made to the trust board that any further steps that may be necessary before implementing the changes, be determined taking into account the number of objections that may be received.

## **170. Risk Register:**

A copy of the risk register had been previously circulated and the CEO reported that it had been revised to include as a possible risk, the expansion of the ULT. Discussion followed and consideration given to other risks that should be included and those that should be removed as they were no longer considered a risk.

It was resolved –

- i) That the revised risk register be received and approved, subject to the inclusion of the implementation of the redundancy benefits scheme as a possible risk.
- ii) That the risk register also be revised to remove the new school funding formula as a risk, given that it had been approved.

## **171. Policy Approval:**

### **a) Finance Procedures**

A copy of the revised policy had been previously circulated and the CFO reported that recommended changes to the policy had been highlighted. Discussion followed and trustees recognised the need to ensure that the role of the Finance committee, as outlined in the policy, was aligned to that shown in the scheme of delegation. A number of other suggested changes to the finance procedures were proposed.

It was resolved –

That the Finance procedures be received and approved, subject to further changes as previously discussed.

b) Gifts and Hospitality Policy

The CFO reported that it was necessary for the current policy to be revised to reflect recommendations of the external auditor and that a copy would be circulated for consideration and approval at the next meeting.

c) Procurement and Tendering Policy

A copy of the revised policy had been previously circulated and the CFO reported that recommended changes to the policy had been highlighted. Discussion followed and a number of other changes to the Procurement and Tendering policy were proposed.

It was resolved –

That the Procurement and Tendering policy be received and approved, subject to further changes as previously discussed.

d) Appointments, Finance and HR Policy

A copy of the current policy had been previously circulated and the CFO reported that it was necessary for this policy to be entirely re-written to take into account other similar policies.

It was resolved –

That the CFO be requested to draft a revised policy, to cover matters not included in other policies, for consideration and approval at a future meeting.

e) Financial Regulations

A copy of the current Financial Regulations had been previously circulated. Discussion followed and a number of recommended changes were put forward.

It was resolved –

That the CFO be requested to revise the Financial Regulations further and that an updated copy be considered and approved at a future meeting.

**172. Date of Next Meeting:**

It was resolved –

That the next meeting of the Finance committee be held on Wednesday, 25 March 2020 at 5.30pm. The venue for the meeting, and future meetings of the Finance committee, would be Thomas Alleyne's High School, subject to the agreement of the headteacher.

Signed..... L. Trigg

25 March 2020  
Date.....