

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust  
Finance & Audit Committee**

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & Audit Committee held remotely (via Microsoft teams) on Wednesday, 5 May 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

**252. Declarations of Interest:**

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

**253. Minutes:**

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Audit committee held on 24 March 2021 had been previously circulated and taken as read.

It was resolved –

That the minutes be received and approved.

**254. Matters Arising:**

The CEO had previously circulated a report to update trustees on various ULT issues to be considered under matters arising.

a) New Free School (Minute 242(b) refers)

The CEO was pleased to report that ULT solicitors continue to work with the Local Authority, which is responsible to deliver the new school, and that the Agreement for Lease neared completion. There were one or two issues still to be resolved, including the seller of the land to have a 'right to connect' and around various insurances and warranties. The CEO was confident that a way forward would be agreed in the best interests of all concerned.

The CEO further reported that formal consultation for the new school would shortly commence and, as part of this, it would be necessary to confirm the nursery provision and age range.

It was resolved –

- i) That trustees agree to progress the Agreement for Lease, taking account of advice from both the ULT solicitors and Local Authority.
- ii) That consultation for the new school should make clear the nursery provision for a 3+ age range to be offered.

b) Richard Clarke First School (Minute 242(e) refers)

The CEO reported that, due to the need for two parcels of land still to be registered, the conversion date had now been put back to 1 September 2021. The CEO further reported that a 'tenancy at will' could be agreed for the parcels of land but that registering the land was the preferred option and the deferment of the conversion date would provide more time for this to happen. Registering of the land was particularly important for the land entrance being shared with Tom Thumb nursery.

The CEO further reported that the school had no existing asset management plan and that the school's heating system has been identified as requiring improvement. Discussions with Entrust's property surveyor had identified that, whilst the school's boilers were acceptable, the radiators and heating system needed to be addressed. A CIF bid to cover the cost of this work (in the region of £110K) could be considered but the next round of bids was not until 2022/23. The CEO had therefore written to the Local Authority regarding this matter and was awaiting a response.

The CEO also reported that, as discussed at a recent meeting of the Trust Board, further consideration should be given to the setting up of a central role, funded from the central fund, in relation to health and safety and asset management across the ULT. Discussion followed and the committee chair suggested that when considering this option thought should also be given to buying in external as and when necessary.

It was resolved –

- i) That trustees note the revised conversion date for Richard Clarke First School and approve consideration of a 'tenancy at will' should it not be possible to register the land by the agreed date.
- ii) That the CEO be requested to explore options for a central role to support school health and safety and asset management and to present a report at a future meeting for consideration.

c) Gender Pay Gap (Minute 243(e) refers)

As previously reported, the CFO confirmed that the gender pay gap report had to be submitted by October and that the report would be shared with trustees at their meeting to be held in June before it was submitted.

d) Oldfields Hall (Minute 244 (refers)

The CEO reported that, as discussed at the previous meeting and in order to safeguard admissions to Windsor Park Middle School, discussions were being held with the Local Authority to explore the possibilities of moderating the PAN at Oldfields Hall and staggering the increase. Confirmation had been given that it was not necessary to consult on any increase in the PAN and that it is also kept at a similar level for September 2024. An increase could be agreed for 2025 if necessary. The Local Authority had also confirmed that Windsor Park Middle was the catchment school for the housing development at Bramshall Meadows.

The CEO further reported that the future increase in pupil numbers at Oldfields Hall would likely change the school's group size, which was used in determining leadership salaries. The school was currently group 4 but likely to move to group 5 by September 2028 when its revised PAN was met. The CEO recommended that trustees give consideration to, and review, the current Scheme of Delegation which made clear the role of trustees in determining the headteacher's salary but that it was for the school's

pay committee of the governing body to determine other leadership salaries. The CEO recommended that, for greater consistency, all leadership salaries determined by a governing body should be formally approved by the trust board.

It was resolved –

- i) That the PAN at Oldfields Hall Middle School should remain under review and changed at an appropriate time in the future.
  - ii) That the CEO be requested to prepare a report on systems and processes for keeping trustees informed regarding leadership salaries, whilst delegating decisions to the local governing body.
- e) Trust Capacity Framework (Minute 246 refers)  
The CEO reported that views obtained through completion of the framework had been referred to the Ark Academy (mentor Trust) to help determine next steps for continued development of the ULT.
- f) Teaching School  
The CEO confirmed that, as reported at the recent meeting of the Education committee, funding for the Teaching School was to shortly cease and discussions were being held with Mrs Rudge, headteacher at Thomas Alleyne's High School, regarding its future role. This was an opportunity to explore how staff expertise could be used across the ULT to support school improvement and also ensure that training courses could be offered centrally. The chair of the Trust Board further reported that the Education committee had agreed to explore options and to produce a plan to show how the Teaching School could be retained and remain financially viable.

It was resolved –

That trustees welcome the agreed actions of the Education committee and look forward to receiving a report at a future meeting.

## **255. IT Review:**

Copies of the following documents had been previously circulated to committee members to update them on proposals for the IT review and to support the tendering process:

- IT review - overview
- Business case
- IT costings

The CEO went through the detail of each document, outlining in particular the roles of the planned managed services provider and central IT staff. The proposed strategy had been shared with headteachers and they had expressed a wish for 24/7 IT support.

Consideration was being given to the change of contract for IT staff to be employed centrally rather than through individual schools and HR was giving support with this.

Discussion followed and trustees gave consideration to the various IT support packages that could be offered. One particular option put forward was for a helpdesk to be established and which would, depending on the problem, determine how best to resolve it, either through central IT staff employed by the ULT, or a managed service provider. The chair of the Trust Board referred to the size of many ULT schools and that, as such, their IT needs would likely be significantly less than for the larger schools. He was therefore of

the view that a phased approach to an IT support strategy was necessary and that it was unlikely therefore that something could be agreed in readiness for the start of the new school year. The CEO stressed the importance of ensuring that sufficient IT technician support was available across the Trust to meet the needs of schools.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CEO be thanked for preparing the various IT reports but that further discussions be held with headteachers to make clear the level of IT support they were looking for as an outcome of the review.
- ii) That the CEO also be requested to determine short-term IT support arrangements whilst trustees continued with a long-term strategic review.

## **256. ULT Finance Report:**

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

### a) CIF Bids

The CFO reported that the outcome of CIF bids was expected around the end of May/early June. Trustees would be informed as soon as outcomes were known.

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

Trustees had been previously circulated with a financial summary report for each of the schools and a consolidated budget report for the ULT as a whole. The CFO referred in particular to the school budgets and reported that, together with the CEO, meetings had been held with headteachers to discuss their budgets. Discussions had included the in-year balance and the implications for schools in achieving trustee targets. The CFO outlined the various school details and the specific issues causing concern. Trustees noted that staffing costs were of particular concern.

Discussion followed and the committee chair reported that he was concerned that the consolidated schools' budget was showing a £ ½ million deficit for 2020/21. The CFO was requested to prepare a more detailed report to make clear the underlying issues that were the cause of this. This would help trustees identify possible measures to reduce any deficit as necessary and identify for trustees those schools who may require specific support. The CFO agreed to prepare a more detailed report as requested and would circulate to committee members the following week.

It was resolved –

- i) That the consolidated budgets be received and noted and that trustees await the more detailed report to highlight any underlying issue that may need resolving.
  - ii) That, when receiving the report, trustees should submit any thoughts to the CFO and that further consideration be given to school finances at the next meeting of the Finance and Audit committee.
- c) Covid-19 – financial implications for schools and the ULT  
The CFO reported that a record was being kept of all additional schools' expenditure as a result of the implications of Covid-19 and was pleased to report that grant funding was available to support schools in a number of areas, including free school meal allowances and LAT testing. Schools were now also able to claim for other financial

support that had not previously been available to them. A full financial report would be provided for trustees at the appropriate time.

d) School Resource Management Self-Assessment

A copy of the completed self-assessment document had been previously circulated, together with a copy of the DfE guidance document 'School Workforce Planning'. The chair of the Trust Board reported that one or two of the responses to questions in the self-assessment document were incorrect and should therefore be updated. He agreed to inform the CFO of changes to be made.

Discussion followed and reference made to the financial data dashboard that highlighted individual school data. The CFO was requested to set trustees up on the system to enable them to access the information.

It was resolved –

That the school resource management self-assessment document be received and noted and that trustees be requested to feedback any thoughts to be considered by the CEO.

**257. Safeguarding:**

The CEO reported that there had been a recent complaint made against Windsor Park Middle School regarding alleged bullying. The parent had also raised concerns with Ofsted. The CEO was pleased to report that, having investigated the complaint, Ofsted had not upheld the complaint and had also acknowledged that school procedures for tackling any bullying issues were robust. No further action was to be taken.

It was resolved –

That the safeguarding update be noted.

**258. Risk Register:**

A copy of the updated risk register had been previously circulated and the CEO reported that it had been updated following the recent meeting of the Education committee to include possible risks associated as a result of schools not working with each other to share best practice when developing recovery plans.

It was resolved –

That the updated risk register be received and noted.

**259. Policy Approval:**

The following policies had been previously circulated for trustees to review and approve.

a) ULT Reserves and Charging Policy

The CFO reported that the policy had been updated to reflect discussions. Discussion followed and a further amendment was identified to make clear the role of the Trust Board in approving expenditure of school reserves.

It was resolved –

- i) That the ULT Reserves and Charging policy be approved, subject to the identified changes.
- ii) That further discussion around the expected level of school reserves would be undertaken at the next meeting of the Finance and Audit committee.

b) ULT Procurement and Tendering Policy

The CFO reported that the policy had been updated to reflect discussions from the last meeting. Discussion followed and trustees agreed that the policy should be further amended to include a sentence at the beginning to reference the importance of health and safety and safeguarding needs in the policy.

It was resolved –

That the ULT Procurement and Tendering policy be approved, subject to the identified changes.

**260. Other Business:**

Scheme of Delegation

Mr Harper had indicated a wish to further discuss and review the Scheme of Delegation currently in place. Trustees agreed to defer this matter to the next meeting.

**261. Date of Next Meeting:**

As previously agreed, the next meeting of the Finance Committee was to be held on Wednesday, 23 June 2021 at 5.30pm. The meeting would again be held remotely.

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

23 June 2021  
**Date**.....