

**Finance & Resources Committee Meeting
Monday 13th March 2023, 5.30pm
MINUTES**

Present: Catherine Monument Richard Wilson
Sarah Jarman (EHT) Stanley Wilson
Harriet Phillips (Chair) (remote) Toby Allebon
Julia Neal

Helen Andrews (Locum Clerk) (remote)

Item	Notes	Actions
1	<p>Welcome & Apologies Apologies were received and accepted from HL. The meeting was quorate and held in a hybrid format with some attendees joining by MS Teams.</p>	
2	<p>Declaration of Interest None were declared.</p>	
3	<p>Agree Minutes of the last meeting The minutes of the last meeting dated 24.01.2023 were submitted and will be signed by the Chair of the Committee after the meeting.</p>	
4	<p>Matters Arising Actions from the previous meeting were discussed: Item 6.iii The Energy Savings Capital Grant has been ringfenced, in accordance with advice by the Local Authority. Item 9.iv Governors were advised that the water and power has been turned off in the old mobile at Queen Edith. Item 10.vi Governors are advised that the situation remains unchanged, due to the weather. Obtaining parental support to improve the Queen Edith site remains a priority.</p>	

Item	Notes	Actions
	<p>Challenge: A governor asked, what was the impact of the strikes across both sites? SJ explained that there was more impact at Queen Edith on the first and second occasion and that on 15th and 16th the impact was more even across the federation. Both schools permitted those classed as vulnerable and those of critical workers to attend where a class was closed.</p> <p>SJ elaborated, there were very few parents that were either agreeing to their vulnerable children attending or those of critical workers that put their child forward, attendance by these cohorts were manageable.</p> <p>The school has written to the Local Authority, which has subsequently forwarded the message on to the Unions reiterating the impact on schools during each strike day. School leaders and administration staff have been the most impacted but continue to be supportive of the teachers' decision to strike. Going forward, some members of staff have advised that they can no longer continue to strike due to financial implications.</p>	
5	<p>Personnel Update</p> <p><i>Queen Emma</i></p> <p><i>Queen Edith</i></p> <p>The new Head Cook has been recruited, she is very experienced and keen to start. She will join from 17th April 2023. School Leaders are very happy with the appointment.</p> <p>A new Finance Manager has been appointed; they too will start on 17th April 2023. She will become part of the process of the year-end to help her become familiar with this part of the financial cycle.</p> <p>Irvine Knight will continue overseeing the technical infrastructure across the federation; an IT Technician will start after the half term to look after the day-to-day troubleshooting generated by staff.</p>	
6 i.	<p>Budget Overview</p> <p><u>Federation Capital Budget</u></p>	

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	<p>A summary was provided by the Business Manager and circulated ahead of the meeting. Some expenditure has been spent on securing the new fob system, which has made a positive impact on the warmth at Queen Edith. Both sites are now more secure.</p> <p>Discussion elaborated on the details of the Energy Savings Grant. Given the specific scope of how this funding can be spent, the project must be managed well going forward. Governors were reminded that this budget has been ringfenced, as per guidance by the school's Financial Adviser.</p> <p>Challenge: A governor suggested, at one point, we thought we would not have to spend it? The LA Finance Adviser has advised to ringfence it. The carry forward will be confirmed from next week. The Energy Efficiency Grant could potentially be used for lighting at Queen Emma. The hatch will remain a priority at Queen Edith. Governors were concerned by the fact that many lights still get left on whilst not in use. Both schools are encouraging staff and pupils to be more environmentally friendly and considerate of ever-increasing utilities costs.</p> <p>Challenge: A governor asked, how is this fund being used next year? CM is not expecting next year's tranche of the funding to be as large as this year's, approximately £9k was received per school this year.</p> <p>Challenge: A governor asked, are there any energy saving dimensions to removing the old school mobile? Governors were advised that removal of the school mobile has become a priority, but finances are tight. Governors considered if there was a group in the community that would be willing to remove it. The school is now considering removal/disposal; both the plumbing and utilities make this fairly easy. The school is sure that the mobile does not contain asbestos. It is not referenced within the Asbestos Register, but this will be checked. Several quotes received to date have deemed disposal expensive. Governors discussed other options within the community that may be able to help.</p>	

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ii.	<p><u>Revenue</u></p> <p>Teacher and Support staff pay increases mean that the school has had more outgoings than income this year. Leaders have led the school more cautiously in terms of ongoing costs. Due to recruitment issues, supply is being utilised to fill gaps in capacity where it is needed.</p> <p>A Teaching Assistant has just been recruited to fill a role previously being filled by supply. Other agency fees, for the supply Cook and Finance Manager, will end once the new recruits are in role.</p> <p>Challenge: A governor suggested, referring to the February 2023 BMR circulated ahead of the meeting, that it looks like the costs are quite high for this budget (E09).</p> <p>CM tried to access the financial system to drill down into the details of this budget. It was suggested that this budget includes all the training incurred by the implementation of Read, Write, Inc. and other schemes.</p> <p>Action: CM will provide the Chair with details of the spend on the E09 ledger to ensure spend is not above that expected.</p> <p>Challenge: A governor noted, in general terms, if the pay awards are not funded, then the school will be in financial trouble from the next financial year.</p> <p>Yes, that's correct. The pay awards are not being funded and have been backdated. The School Business Manager explained how the pay awards, for both teaching and support staff, have been costed and backdated. Agreement on future pay awards have yet to be agreed, which makes the budget build predictions very challenging.</p> <p>The federation is in a much better financial position than other local schools; some are already experiencing an in-year deficit budget. The federation will start to review how it uses agencies to plug recruitment gaps;</p>	<p><u>CM – to provide HP with details of the spend on E09 budget code</u></p>

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	<p>staff redundancies will be the very last resort. Both schools will not recruit to fill vacancies and will save money through natural wastage rather than consider redundancies. The SBM reassured governors that there will be other areas of the budget than can make further savings. There are some teachers across the federation that have been in position for many years and are paid well, staffing continues to be the biggest expenditure. Governors discussed other projects, such as the IT upgrades. The servers are also coming towards the end of their life. Governors were made aware of the new devices that are required across the federation as a minimum, amounting to approx. £7.5k. The new IT Technician will be on site to troubleshoot and take on the IT inventory to support an IT Maintenance Cycle going forward; Irvine Knight will continue to provide the technical support to both schools as part of their contract as ICT Service Providers.</p> <p>A governor noted that all school trips cost and income cancel each other out. CM is meeting with Ray Byford next week to review the budget build.</p> <p>The balance at Queen Edith at February 2023 is: <u>£23019</u> (£13535 is the remaining amount within this to be ring fenced).</p> <p>The balance at Queen Emma at February 2023 is: <u>£45776</u> (£11496 is the remaining amount within this to be ring fenced).</p>	
7	<p>Nursery Fee Increase</p> <p>CM has reviewed several different nurseries in the area. She advised that any increase in charges agreed at this meeting will be implemented from September 2023.</p> <p>School meals for all children will continue to be provided at the same rate. Governors discussed current charges, which varies according to the age of the child for both each session and the cost for any lunch supervision required per day.</p>	

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	<p>Governors considered the wide scope of costs charged by local nurseries. It is difficult to compare when session timings all vary; some settings also require patrons to book a week at a time. Governors discussed the local demographic of both schools, and how the budget will impact working families who rely on the funded nursery hours to get to work. Governors considered the cost of inflation, suggesting it was easier to raise nursery costs as a percentage reflected competitively with inflation.</p> <p>Ratification: Governors unanimously agreed for nursery fees (cost per session and lunch supervision) to rise by 3%. The cost of the school meal for all children across the federation will remain the same.</p>	
<p>8</p> <p>i.</p> <p>ii.</p>	<p>Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS)</p> <p>The drafted SFVSs were circulated ahead of the meeting. Both drafts remain essentially unchanged. The only concern was around the requirement of specific finance related training for governors. Governors are aware that training is now bookable via Governor Hub. The Chair offered to attend finance related training session to update her knowledge in the new year; there are no more finance related training sessions available for the remainder of this academic year.</p> <p>Governors were advised that the deadline for submission of the SFVS is 31st March 2023.</p> <p>The Chair of the Committee confirmed that she had scrutinised both drafts ahead of the meeting with the School Business Manager.</p> <p>Ratification: Governors unanimously approved the drafted SFVS for Queen Edith.</p> <p>Ratification: Governors unanimously approved the drafted SFVS for Queen Emma.</p>	
<p>9</p>	<p>Benchmarking</p>	

Item	Notes	Actions
	<p>Governors were invited to Google “DfE Benchmarking” during the meeting; this platform is helpful to determine the schools’ financial and workforce arrangements against other similar schools in the locality. This procedure relates specifically to the SFVS since one of the questions ask if the governing board use benchmarking activities to compare the federation’s costs and staffing arrangements against other comparable schools, both nationally and locally. Governors were advised that the platform is useful to cherry pick schools in the county that are similarly federated and were advised of a local federated primary school that is useful to benchmark against.</p> <p>Governors noted that benchmarking was not an exact science as no two schools are the same; a lot depends on the pupil demographic, IDACI, and how each school is run - not all schools utilise gas, for example, and staffing is very much dependent on the needs of the children. Benchmarking is broken down into several areas, not all of which are easy to determine. Governors agreed that schools have a variety of income streams, such as a swimming pool onsite or specific facilities which can be let out to the wider community; no two school’s income streams are the same, neither is the funding formula.</p> <p>Governors reviewed the workforce data – and noted that the data was collected in 2021. The data used for this benchmarking is always a year behind. Queen Emma is considerably higher for support staff than other schools used in the comparison exercise during the meeting. Governors noted that this was in the height of the C-19 pandemic, and, at the time, there was high risk for pregnant staff meaning staffing costs would have been higher than usual due to the amount of supply used to cover those in their last semester.</p> <p>Governors acknowledged that this platform was useful in comparing the federation costs with other schools. SJ explained that the usefulness of this tool means that it can provide an element of challenge for governors if, what the school is saying, doesn’t match with what is being published. It makes for good triangulation of evidence when governors complete their monitoring duties.</p>	
10	Policies	

Item	Notes	Actions
i.	<p><u>Employee Wellbeing Policy</u> The policy has been personalised for the federation and derives from an EPM model.</p> <p>Ratification: Governors unanimously approved the Employee Wellbeing Policy.</p>	
ii.	<p><u>Application for Time Off for Study or Training Policy</u> There has been a flurry of staff, particularly at Queen Emma, who wish to develop themselves. SJ expressed her concern that training is only beneficial for both the school and the person completing the training, if they intend to stay at the school. The policy outlines the school's expectation around funded training. This policy has been provided by EPM.</p> <p>Governors agreed that applications should be received by Deputy Heads, with appeals being directed to the Head and/or Governors if required. The application within the policy relates to both the funding and/or the time off to attend training.</p> <p>Challenge: Governors noted a section referring to the management of absence. SJ agreed this section should be removed.</p> <p>Challenge: A governor asked, do you ever get requests from members of staff to have a sabbatical from their role? Not yet, but there is an EPM model Sabbatical Policy to refer to, if needed.</p> <p>Ratification: Governors unanimously approved the Application for Time Off for Study or Training Policy, pending checks for typos and formatting errors.</p>	
iii.	<p><u>Probation Procedures for Support Staff Policy</u></p>	

Item	Notes	Actions
	<p>Governors were advised that it is good practice to have a policy in place for the probationary procedures of support staff. Teacher Standards are sufficiently robust; this policy is a better fit for support staff placed throughout the federation. Governors noted the one-week notice period required by both the school and the staff member on probation during this period.</p> <p>SJ explained this policy is useful for those new to working in school/education.</p> <p>Ratification: Governors unanimously approved the Probation Procedures for Support Staff Policy.</p>	
11	<p>Quotes for Servers – for consideration</p> <p>A summary of the quotes received for replacement servers was sent for consideration ahead of the meeting.</p> <p>The school's existing servers are now reaching the end of their life. Leaders want teachers across the federation to be able to access files from home. The existing servers do not support this robustly due to syncing issues. A breakdown of costs was provided comparing the cloud-based option against an on-site provision. The biggest issue currently is that there is not a reliable back-up system when staff do work from home.</p> <p>CM reiterated the note at the bottom of the quote comparison report – there would be no ongoing maintenance costs incurred by the cloud-based solution, compared to the on-site server option, equating to £3k less in total. However, it is possible to extend the warranty on the existing server in consideration of any possible academisation in the future. Leaders have been advised that it is possible to replace faulty parts on the server, however this does result in downtime across the federation whilst the server is being repaired. CM advised that the Local Authority can provide a temporary server at short notice, should the server fail completely. In her experience, the life of a server equates to approximately 8 years. The federation server is currently 6 years old.</p>	

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	<p>Governors agreed that the server would equate to a capital purchase, it would be preferable to ring-fence this money going forward.</p> <p>Challenge: A governor asked, would the cloud-based option make it easier for staff to work from home? Leaders do frequently get asked if teachers can work their PPA time from home. The EHT has resisted the decision to allow staff to work from home during PPA time as it may be to the detriment of other members of staff who may need their colleagues in school during PPA to support their planning.</p> <p>Ratification: Governors unanimously agreed to ring-fence the cost of the cloud-based option and to extend the warranty of the existing server for one year.</p>	
12	<p>Premises Update</p> <p>CM has dealt with some complaints concerning trees on site. RR has been out to visit; CM is hopeful that the local authority will finance any work that is required to the trees on the school's boundary.</p> <p>The door systems have been fitted to both school entrances for safeguarding reasons. Governors noted the benefits in terms of security and the potential saving on heating at both sites.</p> <p>Leaders would like to amend the Fire Evacuation Policy to avoid the need to increase the width of the door. SJ is waiting for more information and guidance from the local authority, an update will be provided to governors at the next meeting.</p> <p>The existing gates at Queen Edith are not compliant under new regulations if they were to be converted to electric gates again. As they are, they are compliant but not with electricity supplied to them.</p> <p>Challenge: A governor asked, do you have an approximate cost for replacement gates? Not yet, it is another project that is on hold for now. The school will resort to using a padlock on the gate for the immediate future, which is inconvenient, but the school must put safeguarding first.</p>	

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13	<p>Health & Safety</p> <p>The minutes of the last meeting were circulated for governors to review.</p> <p>No accidents/incidents to report. Fire drills have been completed. The fire management plan refers to the door issue – SJ continues to work on this.</p> <p>Risk assessments continue, CCTV is required at Queen Edith site - two additional quotes will be required.</p>	
11	<p>Correspondence circulated</p> <p>None received.</p>	
12	<p>Items to be reported to parents</p> <p>None.</p>	
13 i.	<p>Any other business</p> <p>The oven is broken at Queen Edith – a quote has been received for £2,459 by PCM. The same oven has been found cheaper on the web but is not a fair comparison due to the other services included.</p> <p>Ratification: Pending alternative quotes are received and the best value confirmed, governors unanimously approved the purchase of a new oven for the Queen Edith site.</p>	
14	<p>Date of next meeting: Tuesday 2nd May 2023, immediately followed by an FGB meeting to ratify the budget immediately after.</p> <p>There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.45pm.</p>	



Signed: _____
(Harriet Phillips, Chair, Finance & Resources Committee)

Dated: 2nd May 2023