

**Strategic & Finance Committee meeting
Held on 9th May 2024 at 6 pm
in person at Brixington Primary Academy and via Teams
Draft Part I Minutes**

Present: in person: A Walmsley (chair), P Walker (CEO), A Denner, and M Williams
Virtually: A Gosling

In attendance: C Chapman (outgoing CFOO), M Platten (newly appointed Director of Finance), A Gavin (newly appointed Director of People and Operations) and I Candy (Co Sec) (all in person)

Quorum: the meeting is quorate

Circulation: Directors (through GovernorHub), FFT website

	Decision		Action due
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1. Welcome & apologies	
Introductions took place. Apologies were received from I Thomas (illness).	
2. Declaration of Conflict of Interests	
Declarations of conflicts of interests were invited by the chair. None was made.	
3. Minutes of the last meeting of the S&F committee	
3.1. To approve the minutes of the last meeting of the committee (held on 7th March 2024)	
The draft minutes of the last meeting, Part I and Part II, were circulated ahead of this meeting. They were agreed to be an accurate record of the last meeting and signed by the chair.	
3.2. To review matters arising not otherwise on the agenda	
[AG joined the meeting at this point]. The list of matters arising was circulated ahead of the meeting. The following points were raised and discussed, from the feedback from the Feb hub boards:	Appendix 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rockbeare replacement mobile classroom: this will be installed over the summer holiday, ready for Sep. There is no funding to improve the second mobile classroom and it has not been highlighted as a priority. P Walker has approached S Niles regarding the capacity of the school for an update. When they last spoke (Jan 2024) there were enough local school places in the area, which means no growth funding was available. Rockbeare IT migration: the school is not on the list for the current school year for migration because their server does not yet need to be replaced. They will be updated during the next school year. A Gavin will follow up regarding the impact as the head raised an issue around access for KS1 resources (see head's report to the last hub board meeting). Salcombe: section 106 funding can only be used for increasing the capacity of the school and cannot be used for decoration purposes. The school benefited from section 106 funding previously which helped to improve the preschool provision. 	A Gavin

4. To receive and discuss the CEO report

The CEO report, May 2024 Acorn project overview and proposed term dates for 2025-26 were circulated ahead of the meeting.

Term dates:

The proposed term dates follow the same pattern as previous year and are in line with Devon, Plymouth and Dorset.

The committee agreed the term dates as proposed.

Class structures:

P Walker reported that:

- The Trust is likely to lose more teachers than classes and is looking at TA numbers and deployment currently. There is a calculator to do that in an equitable way, based on pupil numbers and needs. The aim is to avoid redundancies. This should save about £600K which is necessary.
- The reduction in staffing will help with budgets but schools will be feeling the impact.
- In 2025-26, the Trust is likely to lose 13 classes, then 7 the following year. That would be an approximate 36 class reduction over four years due to the decrease in pupil numbers.
- Class structures will have to be projected in budgets to match projected pupil numbers. The Trust will also need to evaluate whether admission numbers need to be amended.
- There are enough temporary teachers this year to be able to reduce the number of teachers needed without redundancy. Currently the number of temporary staff will be lower than the expected number of teacher positions that may be reduced in future, however there is only a small difference so this may be achievable through natural changes.

The committee queried when staffing would be finalised so that the budget can in turn be finalised.

This should be done by half-term once any teacher resignations have become known. During the second half of the summer term, new EHCPs may be granted which may alter plans for TAs.

Curriculum budgets are being reviewed to ensure they match priorities.

The committee probed whether it was likely to make sense eventually to amalgamate some of the very small schools if pupil numbers continue to reduce.

Currently numbers at very small schools are stable. It tends to be medium and larger schools that are affected. Options will be looked at. Work is due to take place with the Trust SLT around principles and which aspects may need to be reviewed based on the current budget / income situation and pupil numbers. There is a cluster of small schools in the same area, some of which are part of either Acorn or FFT. This includes a very small Acorn schools with only 12 pupils on roll this year and no reception intake for next year.

The committee asked whether other schools in Devon are doing the same reduction in classes and staffing as the FFT.

By Sep, Devon will have lost one third of its primary school population, so the situation is replicated elsewhere. The Trust has been able to plan ahead for this because of working closely with Devon admissions around projected pupil numbers.

The committee probed whether the Trust is maximising income through having nursery classes and taking children as early as possible to maximise pupil numbers and providing wraparound care (breakfast and/or after school clubs).

The Trust has taken on most of the preschools that were interested in joining. There are regular conversations around extended school / wraparound care. There is an expectation that schools will signpost but not necessarily provide this themselves. The potential income from providing wraparound care can be difficult to evaluate as current parents have chosen schools knowing that there was no wraparound care in place when they applied. Larger schools offer wraparound care which break even.

**Appendices
2 – 4**

Chickerell has a nursery on site which is not part of the school, so there could possibly be an opportunity there.

Growth:

J Medford (PHP) has been gathering contracts and is due to report on this across Acorn, Chickerell and FFT around which contracts will need to be prioritised in the short term, whether that needs to be an extension or a full procurement.

The committee queried whether Chickerell due diligence is progressing in the same way to Acorn and if there is a similar project plan.

PHP have been commissioned to do the work around TUPE and operational due diligence for both Chickerell and Acorn at the same time. There is no project plan for Chickerell because it is smaller and therefore a simpler situation.

The committee probed whether any FFT staff had been to Chickerell since Christmas.

No one from the Trust has visited the school since Christmas. There has been less interaction than expected and no proactive approaches.

The meeting went into Part II to discuss growth further.

The meeting went back into Part I.

Key actions in the due diligence process with Acorn as set out in the project overview document are on track. The key unresolved area is for Lodders school where part of the land is owned by an individual who is trying to sell the land to Salisbury Board of Finance which have different solicitors to SDBE that do not respond to communications. There has been a similar issue for Portesham.

There is no dedicated general funding for schools to join a trust, although there was an early indication from the DfE regional director office that there may be. However, there may be specific funds for specific criteria. One is for schools that have had two consecutive requires improvement Ofsted judgements, which is £75K minimum for school improvement work. This is dependent on the trust / school reserves and is offset by those.

The DfE regional director has been asked to clarify the guidance around potential sources of funding and whether it is the school or Trust reserves that are taken into account, and how that may apply to TUPE related matters which may not take place until after the transfer, so that there is a clarity of the funding that could be available.

The FFT has received TSI funding to work with Acorn (£6K).

The meeting went into Part II to discuss further growth matters.

The meeting went back into Part I.

Director of SI:

The vacancy has been advertised and trustees will be invited to be part of recruitment process.

The chair of the committee pointed out that there should have been a general invitation to all trustees to be part of the panel for the appointment of the head at Westcliff, with enough notice for them to clear commitments where need be, and not just an invitation to the trustees who are on the central hub board. That would help with connections between the board and heads. I Candy confirmed that trustees have an advisory role in appointing heads and Trust executive leaders under the SoD. **P Walker noted the request and will make that clear to the rest of the Trust SLT to ensure this happens in future.**

The person who has been appointed to replace the current head at Westcliff is relocating from Essex and has been a head of a special school previously which will be useful for the school given their context.

The committee discussed responsibilities for exit interviews, in particular for executive leaders and heads, and the best way to hold exit interviews. Trustees would like to understand the reasons that lead executive leaders and heads to leave the Trust. The query was raised as part of the central hub board, especially given concerns about the school. It would seem preferable to have HR do exit interviews rather than line managers to have an independent view. For executive directors, trustees may want to undertake themselves as part of their role in holding the CEO to account.

P Walker

<p>The committee queried whether the role of director of SI could be absorbed within existing roles within the Trust SI team given that the Trust is looking at making savings.</p> <p>That is not an option as it is a critical role, and the Trust SI team structure is lean as it is. Quality of education is a top strategic priority and a position at that level is necessary.</p> <p><u>Exeter Road:</u></p> <p>The updated management partnership agreement is still due to be sent to A Walmsley for review and signature.</p> <p>The governing board of Exeter Road school have just requested that the management partnership be extended until Aug 2025 with C Curtis remaining as acting head until then.</p> <p>The committee agreed to recommend to the trust board to agree this. (The committee does not have delegated authority to agree this under the SoD).</p> <p>The committee probed whether P Walker was confident that the transfer of the Acorn schools would not be detrimental to existing FFT schools, in line with the principle that growth should never be at the expense of the Trust existing schools.</p> <p>What they seem to be lacking is what the FFT does well, therefore they should really benefit from being part of the FFT.</p>	<p>P Walker</p> <p>I Candy to add to board agenda</p>
<p>5. To receive and discuss the CFOO report</p>	
<p>The Feb 2024 management accounts and references for Moxton IT as well as their proposal were circulated ahead of the meeting.</p> <p><u>Three-year budget:</u></p> <p>The latest version of the three-year budget was circulated on the day of the meeting. C Chapman explained that this version was still a draft budget that was work in progress and very similar to what was discussed at the last full board meeting. The trust business managers were working with P Walker and M Platten to update staffing and curriculum areas so the budget can be finalised for the trust board to review and approve.</p> <p>The chair of the committee highlighted that the Trust currently has reserves of £1.8M and is likely to have reserves of £1.2M left at the end of this school year. The board will need to assess the "going concern" assumption based on the amount of reserves expected to remain at least 12 months after signing the annual accounts in December, and this needs to be taken into account when agreeing the budget.</p> <p>P Walker explained that heads have been told that any funds that have been unspent so far should not be spent unless they are essential, to help with the carry forward. Once costs have been narrowed down for the next school year, the team will look at the budget for the following two years.</p> <p>The committee noted the current budget situation.</p> <p><u>Feb management accounts:</u></p> <p>This shows a positive picture due to one-off income which will not be repeated. March management accounts were due to be available soon after this meeting. They required additional work compared to other months in order to be able to submit an accurate budget return to the end of March to the DfE. C Chapman explained that it was useful for M Platten to be involved at this stage of the year to understand the budget setting process and parameters, added to which there are the transfers due for September.</p> <p><u>IT strategy:</u></p> <p>C Chapman pointed out that the references that she had obtained looked really strong and that she had spoken to a primary CFO who was really positive about the impact of the review conducted by Moxton for their trust.</p> <p>The following points were raised and discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst the review would be costly, it is likely to be beneficial given the level of IT at Chickerell and that Acorn are using a different IT platform to the FFT. 	<p>Appendices 5 – 6</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The costs of the survey would likely increase further to include the Acorn schools and Chickerell. To represent value for money, the proposal needs to be discussed further to ensure it generates a plan around having an equitable provision across schools and more structured systems across the Trust, plus the best value way to get there over time ("invest in the short term to save in the long term"). This is likely to come under the single supplier element of the Trust procurement route. <p>The committee agreed to proceed with the review in principle, taking value for money and the Trust budget situation into account and subject to checking that the single supplier element applies with J Medforth from PHP.</p> <p>The meeting went into Part II to discuss further aspects to be taken into account.</p> <p>The meeting went back into Part I.</p> <p><u>Transition from CFOO to DoF and DoPO:</u></p> <p>The team will need to make sure that the right person is the contact on an ongoing basis given that the CFOO role is being split in two (Director of Finance and Director of People and Operations). Essential logins have been obtained and a meeting with the bank has taken place around account signatories and access authorisation. The teacher pension audits and TCAF return are also being completed at the same time as the transition is taking place.</p>	<p>M Platten</p>
<p>6. Policies and compliance</p>	
<p>The policy and compliance report was circulated ahead of the meeting, as were the proposed policies.</p> <p><u>Data protection policy and privacy notices:</u></p> <p>I Candy outlined that both were based on templates provided by Education Data Hub which only include minor changes compared to the previous year.</p> <p>Both the data protection policy and the privacy notices (for pupils, staff and governance volunteers) were approved by the committee.</p> <p><u>Policy review linked to the change in staffing from CFOO to DoF and DoPO:</u></p> <p>The proposed approach to review policies that needed updating to reflect this change was to review policies in line with the policy cycle, with clarification being provided on a case-by-case basis until the policies have been updated, and the finance policy being a priority for updating given audit implications.</p> <p>This approach was agreed by the committee. In addition, pending review of all the individual policies, it was agreed that in relevant policies references to CFOO should be read as applying to DoF and /or DoPO as appropriate.</p> <p><u>Trust risk register:</u></p> <p>The committee discussed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupil outcomes were a risk because of the lower than expected outcomes last year, both for the outcomes themselves and because of the growth implication. The trust wide spring data will be available for the next meeting of the education committee, individual school data was available for the April hub board meetings. This has showed that there is a mixed picture on outcomes. The internal peer review process has started with nine of the Trust schools involved in the project initially. The challenge partners project which will act as an external reviewed has been slow to start, possibly because funding has only recently become available. Six trusts are involved and the peer review pairing needs to be organised. P Walker will keep the trustees updated on this. Item 5 around financial risks should be broadened to ensure awareness of the board, and reflect concerns and actions that are being taken to mitigate this. M Platten to follow up with I Candy to ensure the Trust risk register is updated accordingly. <p>The committee thanked C Chapman for all her contributions to the Trust and her presentations to committees over the years, as it was her last governance meeting.</p>	<p>Appendix 7</p> <p>P Walker</p> <p>M Platten / I Candy</p>

Meeting times: start: 6 pm, end: 8.20 pm

Date of next meeting: 9th May 2024

These minutes are agreed by those present as being a true record.

Signed:.....
Chair of S&F committee

Date:.....