



**Strategic & Finance Committee meeting
Held on 20th November 2025 at 5 pm
in person at Blackpool CE Primary School and via Teams
Draft Part I Minutes**

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

In attendance: M Platten (Director of Finance - DoF) and I Candy (Lead Governance Professional - LGP) (both in person)

Quorum: the meeting is quorate

Circulation: Directors (through GovernorHub), FFT website

	Decision		Action due
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1. Welcome & apologies	
Apologies were received from I Thomas (work commitment)	
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 meetings of the committee (held on 21st and 23rd October 2025)	
The draft minutes of the last meetings 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	
The list of matters arising not otherwise on the agenda was circulated ahead of the meeting. An update around the Marshwood Church lease had been requested from PHP but not received.	Appendix 1
4. 4. To review (teachers) and agree (leaders/Trust team) pay changes for teachers, school leaders and Trust teaching staff who are not part of the Trust Senior Leadership Group	
A summary of pay changes for teachers, school leaders and Trust teaching staff (excluding staff who are part of the Trust Senior Leadership Group [SLG]) was circulated ahead of the meeting. The committee sought assurance around the appraisal process (namely that it had taken place and was working well) and that staff performance was being managed well. It was pointed out that no staff should be surprised about pay decisions as they should have been advised earlier in the year of any performance issues and be on a performance improvement plan. The CEO explained that the only reason for teachers and leaders not to progress up the pay scale if eligible would be because they were on a performance improvement plan. The CEO confirmed that the same appraisal process had taken place as in previous years: all teachers had been performance managed using the appraisal process, and decisions had been moderated by the link directors and signed off by them. All teachers eligible for a pay increment had had this confirmed in writing.	Appendix 2

The committee queried the reason for changing the link between performance and pay. Was it because staff could argue that they were not given the opportunity / support to meet their performance objectives?

The CEO reported that unions recommended that where schools had a pay scale staff should progress automatically along the pay scale, and this ensured pay increases were awarded fairly, as any poor performing staff should have been advised during the year and given support. However, the appraisal process was still mandatory. Therefore, performance should be discussed termly and appropriate processes put in place where relevant.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- The committee was mindful of their role as defined in the Academy Trust Governance Guide ("the board must have effective oversight of employee performance and the framework for pay and conditions of service") and the DfE guidance ("the board must discharge its responsibilities effectively, ensuring its approach to, and levels of, pay and benefits is transparent, proportionate and defensible").
- The committee was also mindful of the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH) and associated guidance about executive pay which stated that his had to be performance related and that the Trust pay policy defined executives as being the CEO, DoF, Director of Operations (DoO), Director of School Improvement (DSI), Director of Performance & Development (DPD), Director of Inclusion (DoI), LGP, School Improvement Officers, Headteachers and Heads of Schools.
- There was a conflict between the advice from the unions and the advice from the DfE around executive pay.
- The ATH had been issued late as had the DfE guidance regarding executive pay.
- There was a discrepancy between the report provided to the committee (which stated that pay increments were no longer linked to performance) and the Trust pay policy agreed in September 2025 (which stated that pay increments for school and trust leaders were subject to performance objectives being met).
- The general pay profile was becoming more expensive as the number of classes and therefore teachers was reducing, which meant fewer less experienced teachers were joining the Trust. The average teacher pay point was between UPS1 and UPS2. Leavers (who were mostly on temporary contracts) tended to be on the main pay scale. In addition, teachers tended to work longer in terms of age.
- The pay profile becoming more expensive was true for the rest of the South West generally.
- The MAT finance sector insight report 2025 from IMP that was shared with the committee confirmed the positions of trusts in terms of deficit positions generally, and primary trusts more specifically.
- The committee needed to decide how to approach the inconsistency between the pay policy and the process followed this year
- The committee was not aiming to reverse pay decisions already taken by the executives.

The CEO confirmed that teachers had moved up one point on the main pay scale (MPS), or moved to the upper pay scale (UPS) where they had applied to progress to UPS and were eligible to do so. The CEO gave assurance that pay increments had not been given to any teacher who was not eligible for one or where performance issues had been raised during the appraisal process, and that appraisals had been moderated for the group of people included in the report. The CEO also confirmed that there had been no appeal after pay decisions were communicated to staff.

The committee was therefore satisfied that the spirit of the policy (pay increments being linked to performance for staff within the scope of executive pay as set out in the Trust pay policy and no pay increments where there were

<p>performance issues generally) had been followed even if the process had not fully reflected the policy.</p> <p>It was agreed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pay policy would be reviewed to ensure it is consistent with the Academy Trust Handbook and pay increment approvals were consistent with the scheme of delegation and the terms of reference of the relevant committees. More detailed information would be circulated to validate the assurance given around the pay increments already awarded. <p>It was confirmed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff whose pay increments would be reviewed by the Executive Remuneration and Performance Management (ERPM) committee were the CEO, DoF, DoO, LGP, DSI, DPD and DoI. The CEO would provide a report to the ERPM committee to recommend pay decision for the Trust SLG other than himself. The ERPM committee would provide a report to the board recommending a pay decision for the CEO, after discussing this at its next meeting which would be minuted. 	<p>LGP</p> <p>DPD</p> <p>ERMP</p> <p>CEO</p> <p>ERMP</p>
<p>5. To receive and discuss the CEO report, to include an update on key procurement and premises matters</p>	
<p>The CEO report was circulated ahead of the meeting.</p> <p>The CEO highlighted that the new business structure would come into effect from 1 December and reported that roles and guidance for schools around these had been discussed and agreed on the day of this meeting.</p> <p>The meeting went into Part II to discuss further staffing matters.</p> <p>The meeting went back into Part I.</p> <p><u>Exeter Road:</u></p> <p>The CEO highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It had been agreed to continue the Joint Management for another 12 months. The agreement paid for the costs of seconding the acting head from the Trust to the school and the school was not charged any other costs. The school would also get RISE support and associated funding. <p>The committee asked how the RISE funding was paid.</p> <p>The funding will be released to the school based on an action plan agreed with DfE Regional Director and monitored by the RISE body.</p> <p><u>Staffing:</u></p> <p>The CEO reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new head had been appointed to start at Whitchurch after Christmas. The Trust was looking at ways to cover the head maternity leave at Newton Ferrers which would be a short period of time. The Director of Operations (DoO) would be starting on 1 December. She came from the charity but not education sector, was the current CEO of a charity, and had previously been the COO of another charity. <p>The committee queried whether IT would be within the role of the DoO.</p> <p>This was the case. There would also be three key procurement projects - cleaning and catering, finance system and PPM – for her to undertake, with support from PHP under the procurement wrap agreement.</p> <p>The committee asked whether the trust was likely to reduce the procurement wrap with PHP once the DoO had settled in her role.</p> <p>The CEO felt this should be the case.</p> <p><u>Premises:</u></p> <p>The CEO reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At Sidmouth, the steel frame was now in place and a visible and welcome sign of progress. The Newton Ferrers roof project was being progressed step by step. It would be a complex process because of the nature of the work and it 	<p>Appendix 3</p>

<p>needing to take place while the building was in use. It was likely that the cost would be spread across two years of SCA.</p> <p><u>Nurseries including proposal to extend Mary Dean's age range:</u> The CEO reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was now a second round of grants which the Trust could apply for and this required LA, and where relevant Diocese approval, as part of the application process. • Consultation had taken place for the proposal to extend the age range at Mary Dean's as per the proposal document circulated to the committee. The proposal which had not been eligible for the first round of grants was eligible for the second round of grant and had the approval from Plymouth LA and from Exeter Diocese. • The Trust was also looking at applying for other schools, and some of the proposals were likely to involve extending their age range. <p>The committee approved the proposal to extend the age range at Mary Dean's to be 2 to 11 (from 3 to 11).</p>	
<p>6. To receive and discuss the DoF report, to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management accounts for Sep 2025 • Update on budget and annual accounts 	
<p>The DoF report and Sep 2025 management accounts were circulated the day before the meeting</p> <p><u>External audit:</u> The DoF highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were a few outstanding minor points on the accounts following the close-up meeting, but all substantial work had been completed. • The in-year deficit was confirmed to be £20K, including redundancy costs, so the Trust reserves at the start of the current financial year, approximately £1.340K, were much higher than anticipated when the budget had been agreed. This meant that reserves were about 3.7% of the 2024-25 income, still below the 5% recommended by the DfE, but nearer that threshold than anticipated. <p>The committee chair confirmed positive feedback had been received from the auditors and that there had been no adjustments to the Trust figures as a result of the audit.</p> <p>The committee thanked the finance team and schools for their work which contributed to this positive outcome.</p> <p><u>Management accounts:</u> The DoF highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst the Oct 2025 management accounts would be more accurate because Sep tended not to be a typical month, he was confident that income had been budgeted accurately, as had staffing. • He would circulate a forecast to the November audit & risk committee meeting which would include the new pensions contribution figures. • Once the new structure was in place, the forecasting process would change. • The LGPS pension contributions looked like they would be decreasing. The majority of support staff were in the Peninsula scheme (approximately 80% of eligible staff), and the rest were in the Dorset scheme. Actuaries had done the three yearly scheme valuation to review contribution figures and both schemes had seen an improvement in their underlying position. This meant that the Dorset scheme employer contribution, currently 22.6%, was likely to drop by one percentage point each year for the next three years from April 2026 onwards. The Peninsula scheme employer contribution, currently 22.9%, were likely to drop by 5.7 percentage points from next April 2026 then plateau. As the Trust paid around £2M in employer pension contribution, these changes would have a significant impact on staff expenditure. 	<p>Appendix 4</p>

<p>The committee noted that this would be helpful for the 'going concern' report linked to the approval of the accounts. as was the DfE announcement of a GAG increase of about 2% which was likely to be based on the teachers' recommended pay scale rise.</p> <p><u>Finance team structure:</u> The DoF reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The structure of the finance team had changed at the same time as the changes around the trust business manager roles. • The finance team would have two 'arms': one around technical aspects (management accounts, workflows, PSF transactions and advice around those) and one around practical aspects (budgets, performance vs budgets, identifying risks and opportunities within budgets, and supporting the financial side of grant applications). • One internal and one external person had been recruited to fill two of the positions of finance officer. • The new post holders would initially be based at the Axminster Hub. <p><u>IT:</u> The DoF highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of the work undertaken by RM was around reviewing the Trust schools' current infrastructure and recommending improvements to this so the schools met DfE standards. • Some schools had been granted funding towards the cost of improvements where their provision was particularly poor. Some elements would be financed by Schools Capital Allocation. The Trust would need to ensure value-for-money and prioritise the work needed to meet standards based on affordability vs funding. • This work would be followed up by the Director of Operations when in post. <p>The committee enquired about the work being done by Moxton (IT strategy advisors).</p> <p>The company was continuing to work with the Trust and RM, as part of regular meetings. The process had been more complicated with the IT lead and Director of People & Operations leaving which meant that currently it was useful to have technical independent advice. However, the Trust would need to review the model in time. For example, it may be possible to share services with other local trusts.</p> <p><u>Cybersecurity:</u> Following the previous discussions around review and insurance, the DoF had made enquiries through current Trust insurers and got two recommendations for cybersecurity insurance. The first quote received was for £250K cover at a cost of £16K. The second quote would be shared when available. The committee discussed that the cost of the first quote seemed disproportionate to the amount of cover provided.</p> <p>The DoF confirmed he would follow recommendations obtained for potential reviewers.</p> <p>The chair of the committee thanked the DoF for the positive report around the Trust financial position and the accuracy of the information shared with the committee.</p>	
<p>7. Policies and compliance</p> <p>The policies and compliance report and the proposed policies/notices were circulated ahead of the meeting.</p> <p><u>Privacy notice templates for pupils & families, workforce and governance volunteers:</u> These set out how personal data is used and shared. <u>The privacy notices were adopted by the committee.</u></p> <p><u>CCTV policy:</u> This policy was adopted by the committee.</p> <p><u>Record retention and deletion policy:</u></p>	<p>Appendix 5</p>

<p>This policy was adopted by the committee.</p> <p>The committee noted that further work was required on implementing this <u>Fraser Portrait DPIA</u>: This was accidentally not circulated to the committee. The LGP explained reasons for it and the work done. The committee agreed with the approach taken and noted the risks around school photographers generally. The DPIA was circulated after the meeting and the committee asked to contact the LGP with any queries or comments.</p> <p><u>Acorn / Chickerell:</u> Both organisations will need to submit their confirmation statement as they are still live. The FFT has had communication from HMRC about both which may have been the reason for their striking off being suspended</p> <p><u>Finance procedures and policy:</u> The DoF highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • following the change in the finance team structure, whilst roles would change, the same key principles would continue to apply in terms of segregation of duty and approval thresholds. • the policy and procedures would be updated to reflect the changes. <p><u>Trust risk register:</u> The committee agreed to decrease the likelihood (from 3 to 1) and impact (from 4 to 3) of risk no 8 as no school had joined or was due to join in the near future. The committee discussed risk 9 (cybersecurity) and agreed that insurance would be added as mitigation measure. The committee further discussed other mitigation actions such as printing school registers and parent contact details so these would be available in the event electronic systems could not be used.</p>	<p>S&F committee</p>
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Meeting times: start: 5.05 pm, end: 6.52 pm

Date of next meeting: 29 Jan 2026

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

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chair of S&F committee