

## FLT Resources Committee – Meeting Minutes

### 2 December 2021 at 6.30pm online

<b>Attending Committee Members (Trustees)</b> Board Trustees: Anthony Cook (AC) Chair Duncan Millard (DM) FLT CEO Carrie Insley (CI) Ian Wright (IW)	<b>Attending Committee Members (not Trustees)</b> Alex Bond (AB) David Hancox (DH) Tim Clark (TC) Mark Greenwood (MG)	<b>Attending Others</b> Katherine Wilkes (KW), Audit Partner with Critchleys LPP Anne Lynn (AL), FLT COO Joanne Ray (JR), Operations Manager Tori Ray (TR), Clerk
<b>Apologies noted in advance</b> None		

1	<b>Welcome new members, guests or staff presenting and note any resignations</b> The meeting opened at: 6.35pm. AC welcomed everyone.
2	<b>Apologies for absence, confidentiality and quoracy</b> No apologies. Committee members were reminded that anything raised confidentially in the meeting, needs to be flagged as such at the time. Due to attendance levels, the meeting was quorate.
3	<b>Matters to be raised as urgent A.O.B</b> None
4	<b>Declaration of any personal/business interests relating to this meeting</b> None
5	<b>Approve minutes of previous meeting</b> The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate representation of proceedings and were <b>APPROVED</b> .
6	<b>Review of Carried Over Actions</b> The status of all actions were checked – see Carried over Actions document for details. No areas of concern.
7	<b>Other activity agreed out of Committee</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers' Pay Policy 2021 – no further issues to discuss.</li> </ul>
9	<b>Financial and Annual Report/Accountant's Report</b> To make the most efficient use of people's time, AC then welcomed Katherine Wilkes from Critchleys to speak to the Committee about the Financial and Annual Report/Accountant's Report. Committee members had all seen the accounts in advance, so KW shared her thoughts on the headline figures and summarised the audit findings. KW highlighted two new sections of the Audit report this year: 1) confirmation that the Trust is a going concern and 2) non-compliance of laws, regulations and fraud and the procedures followed by the audit group to establish their findings. KW discussed some of the key figures in the report and highlighted the auditors felt reassured by their findings and can see similar trends between FLT and other Trusts. Other headlines included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Trust has improved its cash holdings and has a strong net assets position.</li> <li>Restricted and unrestricted income funds have improved this year.</li> <li>There is an appropriate balance of Trust Reserves and the Trust demonstrates a confident consideration of anticipated future costs.</li> <li>No concerns regarding VAT on deferred income.</li> <li>Vast majority of funds have been spent in year, as appropriate.</li> <li>The Trust is in a positive position regarding restricted fixed assets.</li> <li>Pensions – slightly complex as two different schemes – multi employer and local government. The Trust's liability on the latter has increased by c.£2million, which is similar to other academy trusts.</li> </ul> <p>There was further discussion regarding the desire to regularly and consciously check we have the right balance of reserves. Also clarification questions regarding recoverable VAT.</p>

### Audit Review – management letter

KW shared some highlights from the management letter including:

- Critchleys performed a substantive audit based on testing.
- Significant thanks to AL, Jane and the Central Team for their contribution and participation.
- The result was a clean opinion of the Trust and no audit adjustments.
- Four control weaknesses were found – these were low risk points and weren't major concerns.

Audit focus areas included:

- Income - no significant issues arising
- Systems and controls - no concerns
- Pension - no concerns
- Related party transactions - all appropriately disclosed
- Capital expenditure - no issues arising
- Insurance claims - all accounted correctly, no adjustments
- Restricted funds - no issues arising

Potential control weaknesses found included:

- Lettings Policy - matters resolved and issues closed
- VAT submission delay - now up to date and resolved

Overall the issues arising were minor. There are no outstanding concerns and the findings show the Trust is well controlled.

An outstanding question from Committee discussions related to depreciation rates. Why are they different between schools, in particular John Blandy School is higher than others?

**ACTION: KW to consult and come back to AC with findings.**

### Trustees Report

KW summarised key topics including Covid reporting and accountability on use of laptops – no issues arising in the Trust. And then opened up for questions and discussion within the Committee.

**Q (TC): Should we be worried about what's going on with University pension deficits?**

**A (KW):** No, the Trust's pension schemes are Government backed

**Q (AC): Laptops for schools have been donated by the wider community. Is there anything we should consider going forward?**

**A (KW):** Nothing specific noted by Critchley's – that's a matter for the Trust to consider.

KW confirmed approved management accounts and a draft letter will go to the Board next week.

AC thanked KW and the team for all their work and additional thanks to the FLT Central Team. It is very heartening to see the clean nature of the audit.

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### Health & Safety Report

AL update on FCC English Village – initial CIF funding unsuccessful but since have had good news on funding from OCC. Significant funds look to be available related to the expansion of Faringdon. This would be purely available for new building work, not for renovations. Meeting OCC in mid-January – asking questions in advance to clarify the situation and conditions attached. Critical the Trust develops an appropriate strategy to ensure we make the most appropriate use of available funds. The Committee discussed the funding situation and clarified several points. AL confirmed that the Trust needs to steer building the plans linked to this funding, rather than relying on OCC. JR also confirmed this funding is only available for use by FCC, not other schools within the Trust. It is likely building work wouldn't commence until after this summer.

AC thanked JR and AL for the update and noted this potential funding is a significant opportunity for the Trust which would solve multiple problems for FCC. AL added it may be necessary for the Trust to invest money to ensure appropriate skills and capacity to get the project off the ground but overall it is potentially great news for the Trust if it goes ahead.

**ACTION: AL and JR will revert to the Committee and Trustees with recommendations and a timeline**

**ACTION: JR/AL to share copy of previous 5 year plan with AB and Committee**

### **Driving for Work update**

Report shared with the Committee members. In summary there has been mixed implementation of the policy. JR talking to Heads further.

**ACTION: AB and IW please see if you can offer support**

### **Premises Report**

Good news the Trust has now reached the 3k pupil mark which makes it eligible for School Condition Allocation (SCA) funding from April 2022. This will be approx. £500,000 which the Trust can spend as needed. JR highlighted the need for an Estates Strategy and updating the estate condition reports. The plan will be to manage the SCA funding centrally. This progress is really great news for being able to better strategically manage the Trust estate. Worth noting that a condition of the SCA funding is the Trust needs to provide evidence of a strategic plan and spend on capital projects.

No questions raised by the Committee.

**ACTION: JR to update condition reports and draw up a strategy and come back to the Committee.**

**FJS** – more good news. Successful conversation with OCC regarding repairs to the toilet block. Have agreed £250k funding for this work but it is the last funding we can request. It is hoped it will solve the drainage issues and be underway in summer next year – it is a significant project.

JR confirmed hope to complete the Condition Surveys by February 2022 half term to inform the Trust's priorities in the 3-5 year plan and ahead of the budget cycle. Expecting the work to include school roofing repairs in several locations.

### **Asbestos**

AB raised the question of whether schools should display stickers on walls where asbestos is known to be present. After discussion it was concluded the priority should be Heads taking the lead on ensuring appropriate maintenance within schools and particular staff are made aware, as required.

### **Caretaking**

Appropriate levels of caretaking capacity is an ongoing tricky issue across the Trusts. Recruitment attempts have not been successful and there are gaps in provision which schools are having to try and cover themselves by staff members. JR presented a proposal submitted to the Committee from FJS/FIS and JB schools regarding the possible use of Vale Site Solutions to meet their needs. There were significant discussions of the proposal. The Committee fully recognised the need and the urgency of finding a solution and it was noted that there is a significant negative knock-on effect for Head teachers when caretaking and out-of-office keyholding is not in place. Particular concerns were raised related to the sustainability of the model proposed in the paper – it places a heavy burden on an individual and would require working hours that wouldn't be asked of individual staff members. There were also concerns regarding how the appointment would relate to IR35 and how appropriate cover would be provided in the event of illness. Questions were raised about how working targets and impact assessment would be managed and JR reflected it would be similar to how the cleaning/catering contracts were managed with monthly meetings and defined working patterns.

AC summarised the discussions reminding the Committee that there is a very real and serious gap in caretaking capacity. This proposal is trying out a new approach and is an unusual solution and the Committee may want to be cautious about setting a precedent. The ethical concerns on wellbeing for those involved are real. As are the IR35 concerns. Some suggestions were made to mitigate these issues or future expansion models to reduce risks.

AC asked Committee to vote on the proposal. It was approved with a clear majority but with the provisions that:

- 1) There is a clear trial period and short term review date – suggested at 4, 8 and 12 weeks.
- 2) There is a clear intention to grow and look at the possibilities for having more people involved rather than an individual

**ACTION: JR to progress out of Committee and to provide updates.**

AC reiterated thanks to JR for all the time and effort that has gone into getting to this point.

	P.11, P.12 and P.1 reports had been shared in advance. AL talked through headlines highlighting carrying forward restricted funds plus additional Covid funding received. A number of other trusts and schools have reported positive funding outcome last year but increased risks this year due to growth of costs and staffing issues anticipated.
10	<b>Pupil Planning Review (AL)</b> AL in process of updating census figures. JR/AL managing admissions processes for new schools. DofE have written to confirm the Trust has hit the 3k pupil marker. Despite this, also seeing low reception numbers in John Blandy – not increasing as was expected.
11	<b>Policies and procedures due for review</b> Currently recruiting a new Operations Officer to the Central team – first priority will be to update the relevant policies. All to stay on agenda for the new year.
12	<b>Risk Register – key changes</b> Nothing to update. Recruitment ongoing issue, as before. HR have dealt with 72 vacancies since September. Committee members discussed possible options for how to think creatively in order to improve the situation for certain roles. <b>AC and all Committee members asked AL to pass on sincere thanks to HR colleagues for all their heroic work.</b>
13	<b>Covid (AL)</b> At time of meeting seeing rising number of cases among pupils, in pockets in schools. First quarter staff absence reports related to Covid not available but hearing generally that Covid absences are affecting schools. Also seeing increase in other illnesses. Agencies struggling to provide temporary staff. Expecting further impact. AC confirmed the largest risk to the Trust currently is in staffing – especially in primary schools.
14	<b>ESFA/DFE letters</b> None
15	<b>Staffing Update</b> JR shared an update with Committee members. Key points included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff absences last year were relatively low due to school closures. Currently comparing quarters year on year and will share when have the data.</li> <li>Staff Survey – DM to share results along with management response. Plan to share with staff at end of term. Heads involvement needed so engaging with them.</li> </ul> <b>ACTION: TR to add Staff Survey update to agenda in January.</b>
16	<b>Any other Business (as agreed as urgent)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>FCC Deputy Head change in pay banding (AB):</b> proposal has been received to change the pay band scale. There was broad discussions of this with a variety of views and concerns raised. In particular a desire to benchmark with other leadership positions across the Trust which is an outstanding piece of work already planned. Desire to ensure any new changes bring the Trust into line to ensure accountability and fair pay across the Trust. AC summarised discussions and intention that the Trust owes it to all staff that we have a principled and equitable approach. RC members understand the urgency of the need to advertise the role.</li> </ul> <b>ACTION: AC/MG/DH to meet out of Committee to look at benchmarking and equity of leadership across senior roles in the Trust and revert with a decision within two weeks for out of Committee sign off.</b>  AC thanked AB for tabling the proposal and prompting the completion of this important work.  AC also went on to thank all committee members and Kathryn from Critchleys for really important discussions and inputs. He thanked everyone for the very real progress being made and all in the Central Team for their dedication and hard work. Happy Christmas to all!
21	<b>Future meeting dates and arrangements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources Committee Meetings: 20 Jan 2022, 10 March 2022, 12 May 2022, 16 June 2022</li> </ul> Meeting closed at 9pm.