

FLT Resources Committee Meeting Minutes 21 November 2023 at 6.30pm online

Attending Committee Members (Trustees) Richard Evans (RE) FLT CEO Mark Greenwood (MG) – Risk Lead Jason St John Nicolle (JSJN) Adale Bennett (ABnt)	Attending Committee Members (not Trustees) Tim Clark (TC), Chair David Hancox (DH) Alex Bond (AB)	Attending Others Anne Lynn (AL) FLT COO Jo Ray (JR) FLT Operations Manager Danielle Bradley (DB) FLT Finance Manager Tori Ray (TR) Clerk
Apologies:		

1	Welcome new members, guests or staff presenting and note any resignations The meeting opened at 6.35pm. The Chair gave a warm welcome to all.
2	Apologies for absence, confidentiality and quoracy Committee members were reminded that anything raised confidentially in the meeting, needs to be flagged as such at the time and that the minutes are available publicly. Due to attendance levels, the meeting was quorate.
3	Matters to be raised as urgent A.O.B - none
4	Declaration of any personal/business interests relating to this meeting No new declarations shared.
5	Approve minutes of previous meeting Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate representation of proceedings and APPROVED.
6	Review of carried over actions The status of all actions was checked – see Carried Over Actions document for details.
7	Other activity agreed ‘Out of Committee’ Nothing needing discussion.
8	Finance DB talked Committee members through the school budgets within the 2023/24 Finance Report and the closing positions, including the reasons for changes from period 10. Questions were asked about the future financial management of two primary schools in the Trust and it was confirmed that a managed process is in place to support them collectively as they grow. A purposeful transition plan is in place for the coming years. RE shared thinking on establishing effective marketing campaigns to boost pupil numbers to help support school budgets. <i>KW joined 6.48pm.</i> Audit KW presented the Accounts Statement of Financial Activities, up to end of August 2023. Overall, there was a net movement of funds of more than £10 million into the Trust – the donated Folly View building being a major part of that. KW talked through their focus on how the Trust performed and concluded it is going from strength to strength. In particular, the report concluded: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed asset funds increased • Restricted income funds increased • Pension reserve is in line with academies • Unrestricted income funds increased There has been no significant change to accounting policies. Related-party transactions - important for transparency – the auditors reported it is typical to see under-disclosure on this within the sector. Auditors were very pleased to see FLT is so open and transparent. Committee members asked questions regarding the Trust’s carbon accounting. It was confirmed it is a Company Act requirement to report on energy and carbon, due to the size of the Trust. The Trust is in line with what it should be doing, including a year-to-year comparison. This isn’t currently included within the audit but that may change in the future.

Discussions and clarifications followed regarding the report produced by the Trust's energy broker, benchmarking against other schools to see where we could learn or improve and potential areas for future reduction due to the scope of ongoing work on the Trust estate.

Focus areas - The report focused on areas of potential high-risk, including those required by audit standards. No significant issues were found in the following areas:

- Revenue streams
- Management override of controls including judgements and estimates
- LGPS liability
- Treatment of capital expenditure
- Appropriate expenditure
- New school acquisition
- New school buildings and disposal of old estate – updates were provided on this area including fair value assessments, land registry valuations and historical accounting standards for property and land.

Audit differences - Small presentational corrections were made and one unadjusted audit difference made (for a very small amount).

Control observations - These were explained to the Committee and confirmed as complete. It was noted how hard the Trust has worked to progress issues arising from the previous year and no issues were repeated. The only area outstanding is ensuring best practice on signed employment contracts.

Auditor independence - No issues or concerns arose during the audit.

The Chair welcomed questions and thanked all those involved for the huge amount of work that goes into the audit.

KW left the meeting at 7.30pm

Members recommended the report to the Trust Board (AGM 7 December 2023). Further thanks were shared with DB.

Reserves

The Committee discussed if the Trust should be spending a greater percentage of reserves on pupils in the immediate term versus planning for future risks. It was noted that reserves are on the high side, but this is due to prudence when facing very large IT investment needs, as well as concerns over pupil numbers and EHCP. Overall EHCP support costs schools significantly more than they receive for this area, which has a big impact on budgets. Committee members discussed appropriate levels of reserves and the reserves policy. It was concluded the Trust is being prudent with the public money available to them.

DB qualified some funding/reserves figures linked to restricted funds and discussions continued regarding staffing, EHCPs, supporting additional needs, national issues and trends. Further questions were invited.

Investment

AL informed the Committee of conversations with an education banking consultancy regarding the Insignis platform, which comes recommended by the Department of Education. An outline of the structure, governance and workings was shared, highlighting the low risks involved. A signatories proposal was discussed. Questions were addressed regarding security of money, and it was confirmed no money is held by the platform, all banks are FCA approved and there would be no increase in risk to current arrangements. There would be the potential to quadruple income investment through the platform. Committee members shared experience from other education trusts.

AL has reviewed the Trust Investment Policy. Small changes were made related to credit rating. Discussions continued regarding the short, medium and long-term context for the Trust, as well as risks versus investment return choices.

The proposal was **APPROVED**.

9	<p><i>Pupil Planning Review</i> AL shared budget positions versus census data (October 2023), highlighting the impact of any changes in pupil numbers on funding, broken down by school. Some schools face significant challenges. The Trust is being cautious in areas where there was previously expected growth. This is a financial risk area for the following year. Discussions followed regarding risk mitigation options. Data has been shared with Heads of Schools and discussions with them will follow in early 2024. PAN numbers are being lowered to better manage costs/expenditures, as well as looking for opportunities to share resources across the Trust. It was confirmed the intention is to focus on strategy and the quality of schooling first, setting budgets that allow schools to achieve that. A future pupil-planning figures report is expected from OCC in Spring. The Trust is starting discussions now to ensure there are no surprises next year.</p>
10	<p><i>H&S Procedures Manual – for approval</i> JR summarised the purpose and content, how it is shared and who is responsible. Committee members discussed timings and pattern of review needed for risk assessments. No significant changes from the last edition. Some wording corrections agreed and manual APPROVED, subject to those being implemented.</p>
11	<p><i>Risk Register</i> AL</p>
12	<p><i>Premises report / Health and Safety report and Audit report</i> RAAC Report – JR presented the report. The Trust is undertaking cautious investigations and visual surveys in some schools. Any follow up will be based on the results. No RAAC has been found and risk levels have not changed. Further checks are being done in areas to seek further clarifications.</p> <p>Premises Report – JR talked through progress highlights and projects completed, including work at Watchfield, FCC fire alarm works, and Buckland drainage/tarmac improvements. Other works in progress include Elms drainage and heating pipework, decarbonisation plans across several schools such as boiler replacements and LED lighting. A condition survey report on Ashbury School is due for completion before Christmas.</p> <p>Contracts – The telephony project has been a success with schools and the new system is working well.</p> <p>Compliance report – Shared with Committee members. 89% of activities completed.</p> <p>Policies – Nothing to report. Many require review. JR outlined the approach being taken to ensure progress.</p> <p>H&S – Supporting new heads to ensure they are up to speed.</p> <p>Accidents, Incidents and Near Misses – JR clarified ‘behavioural issues’ term refers to non-contact/violence impacting individuals and shared a report that shows the trends being seen in the Trust. Reporting is improving across nearly all schools but there are concerns about the amount of time it takes. The team are looking at how the central teams can support schools and Heads of Schools.</p> <p>Audit actions – Latest update was shared with Committee members. No immediate safety concerns. Working with Heads to close the remaining actions and clarify what support is needed.</p> <p>Responsible person asbestos/fire training – Awareness sessions have taken place and Heads of Schools are being supported.</p>
13	<p><i>ESFA/DFE letters</i> – None.</p>
14	<p><i>MAT to MAT collaboration</i> RE shared a very positive overview, summarising 40 activities across multiple areas of the Trust. Significant collaboration taking place to enhance and extend provision in both the VAT and FLT. Heads of Schools and Central Teams have met and are working to establish increased capacity and impact. Improvements have been seen in the Inclusion Team and Secondary Teams.</p>
15	<p><i>Staffing update and changes</i> RE updated the Committee on positive senior leadership appointments across the Trust and future planning for mid-year vacancies. Challenges remain for recruitment of TAs and early year staff, and the Trust is seeing increasing illness levels. The Committee discussed reasons for recruitment success, and it was noted that use of the new advertising platform has brought considerable benefits and reductions in cost.</p>
16	<p><i>Centre for Professional Excellence</i></p>

	This is under review across the Trust, with the aim of enhancing the offer, improving inductions for staff, clarifying career progression options and a focus on retention and succession planning.
17	<p><i>Any other business</i> Staff payment request – APPROVED.</p> <p>TC thanked the Committee for their contributions and all those who contributed to the meeting for their hard work.</p> <p>Date of next meeting: 11 January 2024 (online) Meeting ended at 8.53pm.</p>

Clerk: Tori Ray
Date: 29/11/2023