

Minutes of the GLT Operations Committee Meeting
With Non-Confidential and Confidential Sections
Held virtually on 22nd October at 11am

Attendees

| | | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| Sarah Bellingham | Clerk | Present | Clerk |
| Jodie Croft | GLT CEO | Present | JC |
| Carina Cuddington | CFO | Present (for part) | CC |
| Rowena Duff | GLT Director | Present (for part) | RD |
| Beth Gorsch | GLT Business Manager | Present | BG |
| Jason Murphy | GLT Director | Present | JM |
| Danielle West | GLT Director | Present | DW |

Part One – Non- Confidential

| Minutes | |
|---|---|
| 1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence | |
| 1.1 | JC welcomed everyone to the meeting, which was being held virtually via Zoom. The meeting was declared quorate and the Clerk was attending remotely to take the minutes. It was noted that all documents to be discussed in the meeting had been circulated by the Clerk prior to the meeting via Governor Hub. |
| 2. Appointment of Chair | |
| 2.1 | JM was appointed Chair of the committee for the 2020-21 academic year by unanimous approval. |
| 3. Identify Items for AOB | |
| 3.1 | DW asked to discuss the potential for the Trust to receive a visit from the Health & Safety Executive, in the context of Covid-19 and risk assessments currently. |
| 3.2 | JC would discuss the planned provision of flu jabs for staff. |
| 4. Receive previous committee minutes of 23rd June 2020 and discuss actions not on the agenda elsewhere | |
| 4.1 | JC shared her screen showing the minutes and action list from the last meeting. It was confirmed where actions had been completed. Risk assessments were being constantly updated as the DfE provide guidance and would be discussed later in the meeting. The GLT rebranding process would |

be on the agenda for the Trust Board meeting in November 2020. The asset management policy was still outstanding for this academic year. **ACTION – JC**

5. Receive annual schedule of policy reviews (within Governance Arrangements 2020)

5.1 This was confirmed as received by all.

6. UHY Benchmarking Report 2020 – for information

6.1 No questions were raised on this document.

7. Academy Updates: premises, health & safety, staffing and budget

TPA

7.1 JC confirmed that the final planning permission had been approved for the site.

7.2 **Q: Did this relate to a noise barrier?**

A: It related to the requirement to keep noise levels limited by decibels. The agreed strategy had been to plant an acoustic border, funded by the DfE to a cost of 30-40k. This work would start soon.

7.3 TPA's building was fine. External maintenance had been very good to date. The annual external health & safety (H&S) audit would take place on a date to be confirmed. The school was also fully staffed.

DPA

7.4 JC ran through several challenges relating to the roof replacement work which had been due to finish before the start of the autumn term. Works were ongoing, however. Challenges included water leaking into the school building, and a cracked playground surface which would now need replacing entirely with new tarmac. Lots of work had been planned for the half term holiday. Internal works were making progress and 30% of the internal defects had now been addressed.

7.5 **Q: How was H&S being reviewed to ensure the safety of staff and pupils?**

A: The school's principal, Alison, was being ultra-vigilant and there was a lot of dialogue between her, the Trust, the new site manager, and the workers on site. The process was being kept under close and constant review. JM flagged that legally the Trust bore a joint responsibility as the client for the H&S of those on site with the building contractor under the CDM Regulations.

7.6 **Q: Had the external H&S auditor visited DPA as planned?**

A: The next visit was scheduled for January 2021. The Trust was doing its own dynamic risk assessments in the meantime to ensure pupils' safety.

7.7 **Q: Was there a reporting process for staff on the site to report any H&S issues which might come to their attention?**

A: BG confirmed that there was, and that staff knew how to report any H&S issues. The new site manager was also being extremely vigilant. JC did a H&S classroom check as standard within her annual safeguarding audit, and BG said the school's site team did a monthly internal audit involving a large checklist of H&S items.

7.8 DPA was confirmed as fully staffed. In relation to the budget, Alison was planning to purchase 60 Chrome books for the Year 5 and Year 6 students. This would be a spend of approximately 11k and would be approved later in the meeting.

WPA

7.9 Relating to the premises there were a handful of unfinished items which needed work. The building team were on site still for this reason. More of a concern were significant issues faced with the IT provider for the schools. These included a failure to deliver ordered items, failing to prepare purchased iPads for use at the schools, slow desktop set up, a lack of support and communication at a critical time over the summer months, as well as a significantly inflated cost within a recent invoice.

7.10 **Q:** When did the contract come up for renewal?

A: The contract had been in place for TPA and DPA over the period of 2015 to 2020. JC had chosen to extend the contract term at a point earlier in 2020 to incorporate SPA in the service, rather than re-procure and go to an open tender. Once key aspects of the service had been completed in relation to WPA, JC would review and assess the risk of continuing with the company, as compared to the potential advantages and disadvantages of re-procurement. DW flagged that the Trust should be cautious about any decision to terminate the current contract early, as that might incur unforeseen costs. JC noted this.

7.11 JC confirmed that H&S matters were fine. The annual external H&S audit would be commissioned soon, as well as an external audit for fire safety processes. Separately, additional staff had been taken on for January 2021 to help with the nursery pupil intake at that time. Budget management software had been put in place and was working.

7.12 **Q:** Had any schools had pupils or staff reporting confirmed cases of Covid-19 and what was the current level of risk?

A: TPA had been put into Tier 2. The school's procedures had remained the same internally, to include drop off and pick up routines, pupil bubbles and the fining hall rota system. At DPA, Alison was now insisting that parents wear a face mask at drop off and pick up times. Pupils were receiving cooked meals, eaten in their classrooms. WPA had such small pupil numbers, that the situation was easier to manage. Precautions included parents remaining outside of the school premises, all meetings held by Zoom, and a catering service in the hall respecting pupil bubbles.

7.13 **Q:** Was there a need for any extra pastoral care for the pupils?

A: JC said that several changes to pastoral support for pupils had been made this year, based on the 2020 Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance from the DfE. There was now a mental health lead in each school, as well as a member of staff trained in mental health first aid for children and adults. JC had spoken with the SENCO in each school and the staff at every school was on alert for red flags and areas where extra support could be provided.

7.14 **Q:** How were staff and leadership teams being supported?

A: JC said that she was speaking to the Principals at each school frequently about the support they required. At TPA, extra lunchtime support was being provided to relieve the pressure on the Principal and his team over a two-hour supervision slot. Also, the Trust had slightly changed its approach to the performance management targets applying to the Principals with the aim of reducing pressure and workload whilst maintaining an insistence on high standards.

7.15 Q: How were staff coping with such different levels of pupil attainment in their class groups, given the school closure during lock down?

A: JC explained that catch-up funding was being allocated to the pupils who were furthest behind academically. Gap analysis had shown where the need was for the interventions and extra attention. The Trust was viewing this a whole-year process, however, rather than looking for immediate and possibly unrealistic achievement in the first term.

7.16 Q: Was a Trust Board discussion required about staff well-being and whether additional resources could be valuable even if they incurred cost?

A: JC said she would consider that for the next Board meeting. **ACTION – JC**

7.17 Q: Was there anything the Board could do to offer JC or BG additional support?

A: It was becoming increasingly important for JC to relocate her office at one of the schools or elsewhere to enable more physical interactions with the Board members and school staff, and to better store and organise hard copy papers. JC would explore options and aim to organise an office space ready for next year. **ACTION – JC**

7.18 Q: Had JC talked with Principal John Smith about available office space at TPA?

A: JC had and would continue the discussion, mindful of his need to make the most of space in the building.

7.19 DW asked JC to be mindful of the possibility that the H&S Executive were calling schools and asking questions to assess H&S risk. JC would look at the guidance on this. DW would forward JC information on the kinds of things she was aware the Executive were asking for and looking at.

ACTION – JC & DW

8. ESFA/OCC Capital funds and spending plans 20/21

8.1 JC shared her screen showing the GLT information table circulated prior to the meeting.

(RD left at 12pm)

8.2 TPA and DPA had now spent their opening capital balances as planned. The Devolved Formula Capital Grant (DFCG) from the DfE remained to be spent by each school and would be built into maintenance plans for the year. WPA would not be eligible for the DFCG this year as it was a new school. JC ran through furniture and ICT costs and spends planned for this year.

9. Scrutiny of forecast pupil numbers

9.1 JC shared an information table on her screen with forecasted pupil numbers per school, explaining how these figures were arrived at and that the Trust now had a duty to consider them. JC confirmed the predicted total pupil numbers for each school for 2020-21 and 2021-22. DPA was heavily oversubscribed and was known as a first-choice school in the local area. Overall, JC was confident the numbers would be achieved.

10. Review pay recommendations

10.1 JC shared her screen to show the document titled PR Rises for GLT Staff 2020-21.

10.2 JM commented that the data appeared to be in line with the budget. JC agreed and clarified that the Trust had not penalised any member of staff by withholding a pay rise in the event of minor issues only.

10.3 **Q:** Did every member of staff receive a pay rise?

A: JC confirmed that they had. She noted that the TPA support staff pay scale had been changed to align with the current NJC scale, which included a London weighting uplift. Staff all been informed.

10.4 **Q:** Where did JC appear on the list?

A: JC explained that her performance review was pending and would discuss and agree a date for this with JM after the meeting. **ACTION – JC & JM.**

11. Review external auditor's tender 2020-21

11.1 JC shared her screen. This tender exercise had been conducted by BG earlier in the year. Carter & Coley had offered the best price and JC had seen examples of high-quality work. JC would speak with the lead auditor on the phone before going ahead. If appointed, the firm would do the Trust's 2020-21 accounts.

11.2 **Q:** Is this firm a different one to the firm used previously?

A: JC confirmed that it was. The new firm would act as the independent external auditors, and the other firm would be kept as the internal auditors. Both sets were required.

12. ESFA Letters to Academy Trust 16th July 2020 & 26th August 2020 (receive and acknowledge deadlines)

12.1 The deadlines stated in the letters as having been extended for the year ended 31 August 2020 were acknowledged by all, to include those for sending financial statements (now 31 January 2021), accounts return (23 February 2021), and for publishing financial statements on the Trust's website (28 February 2021).

12.2 **Q:** Had JC seen that the letters mentioned the need to appoint the CFO to the trust rather than using an external service?

A: JC said that she had received written confirmation that GLT did not need to do this and that the current CFO arrangement was acceptable based on the fact of it being in place prior to the new rules coming into force.

12.3 **Q:** The letters referred to an aspect of the Trust's Complaints policy

A: JC would look at that and include the item at the November 2020 Trust Board meeting if appropriate. **ACTION - JC**

13. Policies for approval – finance manual and data protection

2020 GLT Financial Policies and Procedures & Data Protection (DP) Policy

13.1 JC confirmed that the finance manual had been updated based on the latest Academies Financial Handbook. BG had updated the Trust's Data Protection documents as well. All changes had been listed.

13.2 **Q:** The DP Policy looked very long at 19 pages. Was there any way to make the main document more succinct, for example by using links to required reading?

A: BG had already produced an 'at-a-glance' GDPR sheet for staff based on the DP Policy, and BG agreed to look at including this within the policy itself. **ACTION – JC & BG**

14. Bank signatories review

14.1 JC suggested that these did not need to be changed. CC and JC were still the main signatories for the Trust bank account. This was agreed to by all.

15. Receipt of Academies Financial Handbook & Accounts Direction

ESFA AFH 2020 & ESFA Academies Accounts Direction 2019-2020

15.1 These were confirmed as received by all.

16. Receive Management Accounts & Annual summary of KPIs – DPA and TPA

Management Accounts and GLT Info Table

16.1 This part of the meeting was brought forward to 11.09am to match CC's availability. CC would leave after her presentation and did so at 11.27am.

16.2 CC first gave a financial overview of the previous academic year. Overall there had been a total surplus of 184k across the Trust, with a carry forward balance of 557k at end of August 2020. The Trust reserves policy required a minimum reserves balance of 217k for the period, meaning that the 340k over and above that put the Trust in a very strong position.

16.3 CC then discussed the financial position of the Trust by location. The Trust itself was on target for its budget within £500 and had an end of year surplus of 37k. This meant a carry forward balance of 83k. Some in year variances had occurred, for example due to the additional cost for BG's role and the loss of the NI allowance this year.

16.4 TPA's end of year position was 7k favourable to budget, with a 59k surplus and carry forward reserves of 113k. There had been lots of variance in-year because of additional pupil numbers. CC discussed a loss in trading income and several additional costs directly related to Covid-19. The overall hit was 32k for the year. This had been counteracted via additional funding due to the additional pupils and donations totalling 14k. Therefore, the school was overall 7k better off than expected, even with the impact of Covid-19.

16.5 At DPA, CC had expected an in-year deficit of 14k, but the outcome was a surplus of approximately 80k.

16.6 **Q:** What caused that?

A: This was linked to the level of SEN funding received, the teachers' pension grant, the teachers' pay increase grant, the pupil premium grant and insurance income. The offset of Covid related costs and savings had also produced a Covid surplus of approximately 8k. JC asked everyone to note the recent updated catering invoice which would amend the 8k figure downwards, but only slightly.

16.7 **Q:** Was CC only aware of the extent of the surplus recently, or had she been aware of this building earlier in the academic year?

A: CC did monthly accounts and amended the outturn as soon as the Trust was in receipt of government grants. Any accumulated surplus or deficit was known all the way along. Today's presentation was just an overview of the financial year in question and an end of year summary. BG added that for some types of income, it was extremely hard to predict if or when it would come in, such as the SEN grants.

16.8 Q: Do ongoing DPA maintenance issues impact the school's income or costs?

A: JC said not and confirmed that all of the maintenance costs to date were due to be covered by Oxfordshire county council. Some invoices needed to be settled by the Trust prior to receipt of council funding, but the Trust would then claim reimbursement.

16.9 Q: Did the Trust commit to catering for each school annually in advance or by term?

A: JC said that arrangements with the caterers were regularly adjusted based on pupil numbers. BG noted that an annual budget meeting was held with them to reflect on what the schools had used, with the potential for a rebate. CC commented that per current government guidance, schools were required to keep catering contracts in place and only negotiate on the frequency and numbers of meals provided to the extent that the caterer's staff could retain their employment. This would avoid heavy furlough costs for the government if catering staff were not in work.

16.10 CC shared her screen to show the September 2020 management accounts which had been finalised the previous day. The Trust was predicting an in-year 4k deficit. This was due to the Trust Business Manager costs whilst also accounting for a saving on legal fees in respect of WPA and the fact that the website re-brand had not been included in the budget. There had been a carry forward of approximately 80k for the year. There had also been a small outturn reduction.

16.11 The budget for TPA had changed a lot, however there were potential savings going forward. The outturn had been reduced by 17k because of additional reception teacher costs. A surplus of 25k was hoped for, given the anticipated reduced cost of staffing later in the year and the greater than expected teachers' pay grant. The expected reserves to be carried forward were 120k.

16.12 At DPA, CC was still looking at the same 99k in-year surplus, which meant significant reserves there. There was a slight in-year variance due to additional SEND funding anticipated in April 2021. The outturn might increase further once that was received. JC clarified that Alison, the Principal at DPA, had plans for suitable projects requiring expenditure from the surplus, however it had been agreed to wait until the maintenance work had been finished before starting these.

16.13 At WPA a 61k surplus had been budgeted for. This had been reduced by 7k recently, linked with SENCo costs. Therefore the end of year predicted surplus was 54k. CC mentioned the ICT spend and the impact of the carry forward balance for the following academic year.

16.14 More information would be available in the next few months and the data would be tracked monthly.

17. Review of spending linked with educational priorities

17.1 JC needed more time to consider how best to structure this item for committee review purposes. JC would bring this back to the next committee meeting. **ACTION – JC**

18. Review and approve expenditure over 10k

18.1 JC shared her screen to show the GLT Information Table. The 11k expenditure by DPA on Chrome Books purchased from 123 ICT was approved by all.

19. Review of Trust Risk Registers

19.1 JC asked for comments or questions about the GLT Risk Register October 2020. JC had updated the issues log as well.

19.2 Q: Did the Covid wording need updating to reflect the situation faced since September 2020?

A: JC would look at that and update as needed. **ACTION - JC**

19.3 Q: Was the GLT Risk Register updated as frequently as each school's individual risk assessment document?

A: JC clarified that it was updated monthly, or more often in the event of a serious incident or risk event.

19.4 DW offered to share with JC risk management software which she had found useful. **ACTION – DW**

20. AOB

20.1 JC confirmed that the Trust would be offering free flu jabs for all staff to help reduce absence.

20.2 JC discussed the building design process at the Surbiton school to include the tender for a design and build contractor.

20.3 Q: Would the Trust be applying for any new schools to incorporate within the Trust?

A: JC confirmed that no new schools would be considered this academic year and that the focus would instead be to complete the Trust's rebranding process and preparing the school in Surbiton for opening on time.

Meeting Closed: 12.35 pm

Actions from GLT Operations Committee Meeting of 22.10.2020

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|----------|-------------|---|
| Action 1 | Minute 4.1 | Update asset management policy in the 2020-21 academic year - JC |
| Action 2 | Minute 7.16 | Consider additional resources for staff well-being this autumn term - JC |
| Action 3 | Minute 7.17 | Set up a physical Trust office space for 2021 - JC |
| Action 4 | Minute 7.19 | Research H&S Executive expectations from school visits in 2020-21 - JC |
| Action 5 | Minute 10.4 | Agree a date for JC's performance review – JC & JM |
| Action 6 | Minute 12.3 | Look at the policy item and include in November 2020 Board agenda if needed - JC |
| Action 7 | Minute 17.1 | Consider best structure for committee review of spending linked with educational priorities and bring to November 2020 Operations committee meeting - JC |
| Action 8 | Minute 19.2 | Update Covid working in Trust Risk Register this term - JC |
| Action 9 | Minute 19.4 | Share risk management software with JC - DW |