

**MINUTES OF THE 102nd FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT ASHCROFT TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY ON
TUESDAY 13 OCTOBER AT 16.00PM**

Present: Dick Whitcutt (DW) - Chair, Richard Perry (RJP), Douglas Mitchell (DMI), Stewart Harris (SH),
Angela Entwistle (AEE), Rachel Branagan (RB) Kevin Chamberlain (KC), Tony Bothwell (TB)

In Attendance: Jane Kiddell (JKD) (Minutes)

Start Time: 16.00PM (via Zoom)

1. Apologies for absence

No apologies to be made as all members were present.

2. Declaration of interest

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of Last meeting

All minutes were correct and agreed virtually

RJP advised the Committee that the appointment of an external IT Advisor is now on hold until Covid 19 is over as the Academy are not able to have outside people in the Academy. This was covered under Section 5, Capital Developments, in the last meeting.

4. Matters Arising

No matters arising

5. Capital Developments

The approved works for the IT storage upgrade started and the SANs Storage unit was purchased with CMC as agreed.

RJP had advised the Committee at the last meeting about the intention to split the costs for the upgrade to the storage facility, with the SAN to be installed this year and the servers and switches left until the following summer.

The works started well until CMC tried to move the virtual machines from the existing servers to be able to upgrade the Network Card but when they tried to link up the old server it wouldn't link due to a corrupt card. CMC tried everything they could to retrieve the server but these attempts didn't work so they were unable to return to complete the entire job due to concerns that the same thing would happen with the other two servers.

This resulted in making the decision to bring forward the server and switch upgrades. ATA already had the costs for

these separate upgrades from all the suppliers who tendered for the SAN upgrade but they were not reported to FRC at the time as these works were not due until the following summer.

CMC were the cheapest again for the upgrade to the switches and the servers at a total cost of £18k for the two elements. The decision was taken to go ahead with this. Bringing the works forward means the infrastructure is now working efficiently, including the servers and switches. The equipment is all fully compatible and the final elements of the work will take place in the term break.

London Grid for Learning (LGfL), our provider for virus and firewall provision, offered the Academy an upgrade to the virus control and firewall it was rolling out to others to enable a faster and more comprehensive operation. This was agreed. However, what should have taken 20 minutes took a lot longer and brought with it many problems. The final decision was taken to abandon the LGfL upgrade and reinstall the original software with a view to re-attempting this in the term break.

DMI advised the Committee that the big test for the IT systems will be the Academy's open evening on Wednesday due to be held on TEAMS. This will involve 70 members of staff on scheduled calls to 210 sets of parents at the one time. Staff have been reassured by Network Support that the system has the capacity to cope with this. However, there is a contingency plan in place in case of technical issues.

The IT system was trialled by JKD with ATA's Specialist Test (the optional test that Year 6 children can sit as part of the application process for a "technical aptitude" Year 7 place at the Academy). The children undertook the test using the Academy's computer systems rather than the paperwork format used in the past. Students submitted their answers on a multiple choice document on the computer. JKD organised the test to be held in the LRC over two days with four groups of 28 students per day. This went very well without any problems.

The work agreed to replace the fire protection panels, originally scheduled for last Easter, had to be delayed but will be completed over the October break.

RJP reported that all the refurbishment works have now been completed and that ATA are pleased with the outcome. With the new spaces created and additional classrooms, the Academy is fully prepared for the additional student numbers over the five-year period. ATA were very impressed with the contractors, who kept to the budget and completed the job to a high standard.

A few minor issues were encountered during the building work, including a drainage link for the new art rooms and the creation of an additional doorway to a room in Zone C, for fire exit strategy purposes. There was some asbestos dust discovered from the adhesive beneath old flooring, which was overlaid and a note made on the asbestos register to be cautious of if ever removed.

DW suggested that KC might have a look around on behalf of the Executive Board once restrictions allow for visitors into the Academy.

Final costs for the project are still being calculated by Wandsworth who are paying for the majority of the works to increase places in the Borough, with some costs to be recharged by the Academy for main works met directly (crate hire/legal fees/anti-vandal paint finish etc.). The Academy contribution was agreed to be around 5% (Circa 26K) although £26k would not have covered all further costs including the IT and furniture, but the Academy would have been required to meet this outlay as it fell outside of the scope of the project but still very much required.

6. Revenue Funding – 2019-20 Update

RJP discussed with the Committee the revenue funding position for 2019/20 comparing figures at the end of August with the previous year. The year-end figures are not yet final and are still subject to audit and will include other calculations such as pension service costs, but these have been taken into account with the budget forecast return to the Educational Skills Funding Agency. The figures are broadly in line with the budget forecast return and the good news is that the reported overspend estimate of £350k is now projected to be around £150k, making a saving of

£200k largely due to caretaker attendance, exams and exam invigilation costs and staff savings from not running Easter revision sessions.

DW asked RJP if the ESFA were looking into schools running at or predicting deficits. Is there a limit beyond which they may look to send in experts to help manage a school's budget (even though ours is planned and agreed with Trustees) Furthermore, if there was a deficit position for each of the 5 years within the forecast budget plan, would this alert them and prompt questions as to what a school is doing to address this? RJP reminded colleagues that ATA has the rationale and reserves to operate as it does currently. Trustees have supported this approach as ATA has reserves in place, built up over a number of years, that many schools don't have. The ESFA would presumably only look to see if the Academy was in financial trouble, seemingly with no control or any plan to reverse this and where Trustees may not be fully aware of the deficit.

In answer to a further question from DW on what the financial deficit would be for the additional 30 students per annum for whom per capita funding is not received for a further 12 months (in line with the Funding Agreement), RJP confirmed this to be in the region of £150,000 in each of the 5 years.

The Academy's annual audit programme will remain as usual and RJP will update the Committee at the December meeting.

7. Revenue Funding – 2020-21

RJP advised that this was covered in detail at both the April and July meetings of the FRC and there is little more to add. He referred to the email he sent on 23 September, attached to which was the annual budget forecast return.

The Academy is still in receipt of the now much reduced Minimum Funding Guarantee that minimises the impact of a drop in funding (ATA having been apparently well funded in the early Academy years but which has reduced year after year, but this still does not take into account that we have a longer day and extra mentoring staff etc. to assist the Academy in operating as well as it does academically.

RJP advised the Committee that we are due to receive funding for what is referred to as a catch-up premium. The funding is intended to support students that have experienced the most disruption to their education as a result of Covid 19. The funding provided is £80 per year student in Year 7 to 11, which makes an additional £86k. This will help to narrow the estimated deficit of £770k for 2020-21 indicated in the budget forecast return, all the while providing targeted support to the students who require it the most, which was planned for in advance of the summer break. With additional capacity in English and Maths particularly, this is available and being used.

A 5-Year budget plan will be circulated at the next meeting after it has been approved by Trustees.

8. Trading Company

The annual profit will be lower than the previous year but won't be as low as the previously estimated figure of 50% of the previous year. Once year-end adjustments have been accounted for it is hoped that this is closer to 80% of the previous year.

9. Administrative and Staffing Matters

Staff Attendance Reward Scheme

RJP talked the Committee through staff attendance reward scheme for 2019-20. RJP explained that this had been impacted by lockdown and that this will happen again in the current year because any staff member who presents with Covid symptoms will have to isolate and arrange for a test. Staff in this category cannot be penalised because they are following government guidance. This is counter to the Academy's normal expectation of full attendance, however necessary in the current circumstances. It is accepted that staff were still expected to be working from

home, but must not attend the Academy if displaying symptoms. We have systems in place to make sure that this is the case and that there is no delay to a staff members requesting a test.

DMI advised that the message has been handled very well due to the attendance bonus, with teachers and other staff using TEAMS and Zoom. Teachers are fully aware that when symptoms start, they must follow the guidelines correctly. To date, all staff have followed the guidance correctly and understand that we expect them to book a test immediately. There had been problems obtaining tests but this seems to be much better now and Wandsworth have improved provision for key workers, either through the ability to order a test or through gaining access to a walk-in centre if not.

The policy has long been in place advising staff not to book routine medical appointments during term time, although some appointments cannot be helped. However, most dental or doctor's appointments should be made outside of school time and if in school time should be arranged for first or last thing in the day. The Cover Director will refer any routine appointment requests to DMI or RJP for their decision.

ATA have managed to recruit well for TLAs this year and have the right balance of staff in the TLA team. As a result, it expects lower levels of absenteeism than previous years.

Staff Exit Interviews

RJP advised the Committee that he will cover the staff exit interviews in more detail at the next meeting as these have not been able to be completed fully due to lockdown although some staff managed to submit comments and were very positive about their time at the Academy.

10. Pay Reviews 2020/21

JKD left the meeting at this point. RJP then outlined the processes involved in drafting the detailed staffing budget for 2020/21 that had already been circulated to FRC members and that the outline parameters for this had been approved by Trustees.

RJP talked through the three papers submitted for this item and explained why the figures showed a marked increase in proposed staffing costs for the year and the three key reasons behind this: additional staffing numbers, the increase in the Academy allowance for teaching staff and the full cost of the national pay awards for both teaching and associate staff.

He added that in view of the increases shown and the impact on the budget - lifting staffing costs to almost 90% of expected income - there were no proposals to offer accelerated progression or bonus payments to any staff and he added that the Principal was not looking to award any short-term TLR3 projects this year to interested teaching staff. DMI added that there were two members of the teaching staff who would not receive incremental or other financial progression beyond standard pay award in view of their performance and he detailed who these were.

Members accepted the detail behind the staffing costs and that no additional flexibilities were sought for the current year.

11. Any Other Business

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 5.15pm.

Signed: 
Richard Whitcutt
Chair of Executive Board

Date: 6/12/2020