

WATERGATE SPECIAL SCHOOL
RESOURCES AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Wednesday, 11 May 2016

Present:

Ms R Elliott	Chair	Ms A Ni Ruairc	Headteacher
Ms J Taylor		Mr G Whipp	

Also in Attendance:

Mr N Frost	Business Manager
Ms E Bowtell	Financial Consultant
Mrs C Munday	Clerk to Governors

1. WELCOME / APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Mrs Tetteh.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Details of governors' current Declarations of Interest had been annexed to the agenda and all attendees were reminded of the need to declare any interests, personal or business, relating to the discussion of any item on this agenda if not previously declared. Ms Bowtell reported that Ms Minto has completed a declaration in relation to her position as a budget holder in the school, with no interests declared. It was noted that RBI forms had not yet been received from two governors and this will be followed up.

3. MINUTES

The following documents had been circulated:

- Draft Minutes and Confidential Minutes dated 14 January 2016.

3.1 Approval of Minutes

It was

RESOLVED to approve the minutes and confidential minutes as being a true and accurate record.

3.2 Matters Arising

All matters arising were considered under the relevant item headings below.

4. PREMISES AND HEALTH & SAFETY

(This item was taken after Item 7.1)

The following documents had been circulated:

- Headteacher's Report
- Health & Safety Action Plan

4.1 Update

Governors were referred to the Headteacher's report which included information on: Premises Management, Health & Safety, Risk Assessments and Accidents. In her verbal summary and update the Headteacher highlighted the following issues:

Swimming Pool

The pool had now been out of action for five weeks following a problem with the dosing unit in the plant room. JC Leisure, the maintenance contractors, had been called out and had removed one circuit board for replacement. However, this did not resolve the problem and a second circuit board has been removed and sent back to the manufacturer, but there has been no replacement board fitted. JC Leisure have been inconsistent with their explanations as to the reasons for the delay, but a new dosing unit will now be provided at no extra cost. The work is scheduled to take place tomorrow.

How have JC Leisure performed historically?

They have been reliable on the regular maintenance tasks but this is the first breakdown situation. The Headteacher has spoken to the Managing Director, who has apologised for the problems.

Are there faults in the way the regular maintenance inspections are carried out?

The Headteacher was not in a position to confirm or deny this but there is scope for challenging JC Leisure concerning the replacement of aging components before they fail. Mr Whipp recommended that an action plan should be provided by JC Leisure setting out the actions to be taken in the future if a breakdown occurs in the future.

If the problem is not fixed tomorrow it is possible to have a temporary arrangement with Greenvale to use their pool?

(Headteacher) It is far too challenging to make such arrangements on such short notice and for what is expected to be a short period of time, but it might be worthwhile putting in place procedures for the future. However, both the Greenvale and Hospital hydrotherapy pools are almost certainly used full-time by those institutions.

On another issue, has a third quotation been obtained for the cover for the pool?

No, this has not yet been received and has not been a priority whilst the pool is not in use.

Reported Accidents to Staff

The following document was tabled:

➤ Reported accidents since 14 January 2016

Mr Frost reported that these accidents have been reported to Lewisham in accordance with procedures, but none of the accidents had been serious and no member of staff had to take sick leave. The majority of the accidents were the result of slips, trips and falls and although there does seem to be an increase in the number of such accidents there is no obvious reason for this except possibly better reporting. The tree, whose roots were causing such a hazard in the playground, has been removed.

The Headteacher reported on one very recent incident which involved a member of staff who tripped over a pupil's foot. As a precaution the member of staff had an x-ray and although this did not show up any injury from the fall hospital staff had identified an underlying medical condition, and as a result the member of staff has been on sick leave for several days.

4.2 Report on Risk Assessments

Mr Frost has reviewed the 'batched' risk assessments which are generic in nature, and which apply to the majority of activities carried out in the school, and all have been or are in the process of being updated and the priority risk assessments will come before this committee in due course.

4.3 Health and Safety Action Plan: Monitoring

The self-audit had been carried out by Ms Elliott, the Headteacher, Mr Frost and the NUT and UNISON Health and Safety representatives from the staff, and was submitted to Lewisham on 9th February 2016. Ms Elliott reported that the questionnaire had changed and as a consequence it now required a more rigorous review of health and safety issues. The score was 67.3%, a high “Good”, but because of these changes, this cannot meaningfully be compared with previous years’ results.

In response to a request from the Chair, Mr Frost took governors through all of the actions relating to risk assessments. A number of these had been completed – glazing, briefing contractors, water, EMT Manual, inflammable liquids. ‘Outstanding’ and ‘In Progress’ risk assessments include: First Aiders certificates, external areas, managing aggression / violence, protective clothing, driving for work and alcohol and drugs in school.

Ms Elliott requested that a progress report on the action plan should be a standing agenda item, which was agreed. Responsible persons’ names should also be inserted.

5. ASSETS DISPOSAL

Mr Frost reported that, with reference to the former stock list, the old IT equipment has mostly all been disposed of, and this has happened in accordance with agreed procedures. The necessary documentation is available and the Headteacher has signed off these items.

The new system includes some items which have also been disposed of, and details are included on the system.

Is there the potential to produce a report including those items which have been disposed of for use in any stock-take?

Yes, such a report can be produced.

How often is action necessary to authorise disposals?

This is on an as-and-when basis, as disposals are needed.

Ms Bowtell reported that the price limit for inclusion in the asset register has been raised to £1,000 in accordance with Lewisham guidelines and this is set out in the school’s Financial Management policy. Also included are any items of less cost but which are vulnerable to being removed, such as cameras. As a consequence the system is now far easier to monitor.

The Chair thanked Mr Frost for his work in connection with the premises items, and Mr Frost withdrew from the meeting.

6. BUDGET MONITORING / APPROVAL OF BUDGET PLAN: 2016/17

The following documents were tabled:

- School Improvement and Development Plan 2016-17 (draft)
- Budget Plan 2016/17 (draft)
- Staffing Structure

Governors were also referred to the Headteacher’s Report

Ms Bowtell reported to governors on the budget plan highlighting the following areas:

- Total income is projected to be £4.8 million including a carry forward from 2015/16 of nearly £805,000 which had previously been set aside to cover single status claims.

- Budget assumptions are that there will be a full school roll with new pupils being on the minimum top-up and therefore, when top-up funding is confirmed there may be some additional income.
- The highest element in the budget is staffing costs.
- Comparisons between Supply Staff and Agency Staff costs for 2015/16 and 2016/17 are unreliable because support staff costs for 2015/16 were distorted by the need to maintain support staff on temporary contracts pending the single status settlement. Many of these posts have been converted into permanent positions and are included as such within the 2016/17 budget.
- Costs for nursery nurses for 2016/17 appear to be significantly higher, but the allocation includes an element of back pay as a result of the single status settlement.
- The £82,000 in respect of the cost of sick cover is overstated in the 2016-17 figures as it includes the cost of two members of staff who are full time employed to provide general cover.
- There is no significant change in the SLAs this year. The budget figure of £93k for Agency Services is for all non-LBL SLAs (including £9.8k to Deku for IT support and £18k for nursing support). LBL SLAs totalling £14k are shown under General.
- Those items previously identified as spending options for the carry forward have been incorporated into the budget as follows: Yoga and Horse Riding (allocated £20,000 but awaiting formal costing), Music Teacher for one day a week (£10k), Music Therapy (£16.4k), Playground Works including specialised equipment such as a wheelchair swing (£4k).
- Other items in the costed School Improvement and Development Plan have been included as follows: the replacing of swipe cards in order to improve security for accessing the building (3 quotes will be required but an additional £20k budgeted) the creation of additional car parking spaces at the front of the building (to be financed out of capital funding), extended curriculum activities including the acquisition of a new mini-bus or people carrier (current budget allows for both at a total of £32k acquisition costs and £5k running costs), PMLD hoist system to be installed in the classrooms (£15k) and the improvement of the learning environment (library equipment, soft play, upgrading of the IT system in the hall, display cabinets and classroom furnishings).
- Contingency / Carry Forward to be £240,000 which will be within Lewisham's balance control mechanism.
- No allowance had been made within the budget for the acquisition of another Acheeva Side Lier (£4k), but the Headteacher requested that governors consider approving such an acquisition. This piece of equipment is very beneficial for PMLD pupils (one quarter of school's pupil population). Governors agreed that this would be a very useful acquisition.
- In Admin and Clerical staff, a FTE Finance Manager (grade PO1) has now been budgeted for for the remaining two terms of FY15-16.

There seems to be a very significant increase in the budget allocation for agency supply staff. Why is this?

(Ms Bowtell) There was misallocation of expenses last year and this figure is now a correct representation of the anticipated expenditure, and is the result of a re-balancing of the budget.

The actual cost of agency staff in 2015/16 was £283,000 and therefore the budget allocation this year represents a significant reduction.

What is the position regarding the SLA for nursing services?

(Headteacher) Consideration has been given to the possibility of using a different provider, but this may not be possible. However, a new nurse has now been allocated to the school, with a consequential improvement in standards and relationships.

Governors were then referred to the staffing structure and this was noted, with no questions being raised.

It was

RESOLVED to approve the budget plan with an amendment to the departmental allowance for the acquisition of the Acheeva Side Lier

The Chair thanked Ms Bowtell for her work on the budget.

(Ms Taylor withdrew from the meeting at this point)

7. OTHER FINANCE ISSUES

The following document documents had been circulated:

- SFVS Questionnaire with responses
- School Financial Management Policy and Code of Practice (amended)

The following documents were tabled:

- Debt Write Off Schedule

7.1 Financial Audit: Update

(This item was taken after Item 3)

The following document was tabled:

- Follow Up Review for Watergate Primary School

The Headteacher reported that the follow up report related to the Limited Assurance Audit Report from last June had only been received yesterday. The follow up review was to assess progress against the actions identified at the June audit and the auditor was impressed with the progress achieved. The Headteacher highlighted the following risks and actions which are the only ones still outstanding:

Recommendation 19: School Voluntary Fund (In Progress)

Mr Frost reported that new arrangements for the auditing of the voluntary fund have now been agreed and an accountant has been appointed. The voluntary fund accounts for the last four years are now being audited and the signed accounts should be received by the end of May.

Are these arrangements transitional or permanent?

(Ms Bowtell) The intention is for these arrangements to be permanent.

Recommendation 13: Annual Inventory Check - (Not Implemented)

The Auditor is satisfied with the work to date on the new asset register, it had been noted that the register needed to be signed off by the Headteacher and manual checks must be scheduled – probably at the start of the new school year each September when classroom

staff teams swap around. The Auditor had also picked up on discrepancies regarding two security cameras, one of which is not on the new system. This is being resolved.

All other high and medium risk actions had been addressed.

Is the auditor scheduled to make a return visit?

(Ms Bowtell) The next visit is expected to be part of the standard three year cycle.

The Chair thanked Ms Bowtell, Mr Frost and the Headteacher for their work on the action points from the audit report.

(Discussion of the rest of this item was taken after Item 6)

School Financial Management Policy and Code of Practice

Ms Bowtell reported that the revised Code is based upon the Lewisham model and the most significant changes are as follows:

- The number of signatories for the bank account has been increased to five.
- Inclusion of a procedure for the approval of virements, with the Headteacher having authority to approve virements up to £1,000 and the Chair of Governors having authority up to £5,000. Thereafter, approval falls to this committee.
- The increase in the financial limit for the asset register to £1,000.
- In relation to security, the nominated key holders have been changed to reflect current practice.

There was a brief discussion concerning the keyholders for the small school safe and the need to maintain the integrity of the passcode. The Headteacher acknowledged that the practice in this area needs to be improved and that the passcode should now be changed to minimise the number of people who are able to access the safe.

Within the Petty Cash / Reimbursement reference is made to a limit of 10% of any budget being spent on local purchases via the petty cash account. How is this monitored?

Ms Bowtell thought that this would in reality be difficult to monitor and will be restricting for the office staff and the Headteacher was not in a position to confirm that this procedure is strictly observed. In the circumstances it was recommended that the item be deleted.

With reference to the Voluntary Fund, should this be 'audited' rather than 'examined'?

Ms Bowtell had researched the Charity Commission website to check the recommended procedures, which stated that an audit only needs to take place if a charity has an income of over £5,000 a year, which is not the case with the voluntary fund. Governors might wish to consider whether to apply for charitable status in relation to this fund.

It was

RESOLVED that the revised Code be recommended to the governing body for approval with the following changes:

- the deletion of the final bullet point under Petty Cash / Reimbursement.
- The Voluntary Fund to be audited.

There will be further research into the possibility of acquiring charitable status for the voluntary fund.

7.2 Report on New ICT Equipment

The Headteacher was very pleased with the new servers and IT equipment which was installed over half term and declared that this had been transformatory in terms of access to IT in the school.

7.3 Debt Write Offs Approval Schedule

Ms Bowtell explained that there is an element of catch-up now taking place, with authorisation having to be made in retrospect for previous decisions to write off certain debts, in particular in relation to cancelled invoices issued to the Lewisham Short Break service. In relation to arrears of dinner money, families are pursued, but governors agreed with the Headteacher that meals should not be withheld from pupils in the event of non-payment. However, the Headteacher acknowledged that, if there were to be a long term problem with any particular family it might precipitate a referral to social services on the grounds of neglect. It was

RESOLVED that the Chair of the Committee sign to retrospectively approve the write-offs of the debts tabled on the schedule.

7.4 Virements made since Last Meeting

There were no virements for approval.

7.5 SFVS Questionnaire

Ms Elliott reported that the three main areas for improvement are the asset register (on-going), the Headteacher's performance appraisal (has now taken place) and the asset management plan (Ms Elliott will be following up on this item with the local authority).

In relation to benchmarking, Ms Bowtell tabled the results of a benchmarking exercise relating to the costs of staff using as comparators other local special schools. In future governors should decide upon the items of expenditure to be benchmarked. From the tables it was noted that Watergate's expenditure on staffing is reasonable and there are no actions to be taken.

Is it possible to obtain data specifically on Leadership pay?

Ms Bowtell did not think that this category exists on the website.

Because of the changes to support staffing since the resolution of the single status appeals governors thought that it would be a useful exercise to benchmark support staff costs again and it was

RESOLVED that benchmarking of support staff costs be carried out by Ms Bowtell for a report to the next meeting of the committee and to be benchmarked again in one year's time in order to see the effect of the changes.

8. POLICY REVIEW

The following document had been circulated:

- Debtors' Policy

The policy had been based upon a Lewisham template. Ms Bowtell reported that outstanding debts are low at present, with one particular family currently in arrears with dinner money. The Headteacher will liaise further with the family in question to ascertain whether there is a particular financial difficulty.

Governors requested that the policy be amended to include specifically a requirement for a member of the leadership team to meet with parents who are in arrears, to stress the importance for the child to have a school meal, and parents' own duty of care to their child.

It was

RESOLVED to approve the Watergate School Debt Policy with the recommended changes.

9. FURTHER ITEMS FOR INFORMATION / ACTION

9.1 Website Review

The Headteacher reported that David Scott – the School Improvement Adviser – provided a report on the compliance of the website back in November 2015. He confirmed that the website was mostly compliant. Work continues on the redesign of the website. It was

RESOLVED that Ms Elliott will take responsibility for keeping the website under review to ensure compliance.

9.2 Governors' Training

Governors were referred to the Governors' Information Pack for details of training relating to the work of this committee. Ms Elliott stressed the need for as many governors as possible to attend the Health & Safety training – now in two separate modules – and the Basics of School Finance training.

9.3 Relevant Articles in the Governors' Information Pack

Governors were referred to articles in the Governors' Information Pack concerning schools' finance.

9.4 Consultation on Schools National Funding Formula

Governors were referred to a current DfE consultation on proposals for a national funding formula for schools.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business brought to the meeting.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The schedule of meeting dates for 2016/17 will be agreed at the next meeting of the governing body, but it was

RESOLVED that this committee will in future meet at 9:15 a.m.

(Clerk's Note: It was agreed at the GB meeting in September that the committee will in future meet at 3:30 p.m.)

12. CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

Governors determined that discussion of one item concerning the After School and Holiday Clubs be recorded in the confidential minutes and should not be available for public inspection.

SIGNED R Elliott

DATED 17 November 2016