

## **Minutes of Resources Committee 17.30 Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> February**

**Present:** Tony Davies, Ricardo Herbane (chair), Chris Jagger, Debora Lucarelli, Richard Warwick, Andrew Grieve, Christina Bates, Julie Murphy, Linda Jones

**1. Apologies for absence:** none

**2. Declarations of pecuniary interest:** Christina is the NEU Covid rep

**3. Minutes of Resources committee, 24.11.21:** Approved, with no amendments.

**4. Matters arising:** none not already on agenda. RH liked format of minutes.

### **5. Review latest budget monitoring reports:**

TD introduced latest monitoring report and financial survey report, highlighting the very challenging year for managing resources. 'Perfect storm' of staff absences (Covid and long term), absence of lettings and requirements for staff cover as pupils still in school this year if teachers off with Covid. Nonetheless, the outturn was not very different to that forecast, though lower than hoped for pre-pandemic.

- DL sought clarification about potential for remote input from Covid affected staff and trends in cases. TD confirmed that many staff were quite ill and couldn't teach class. Staff cases were rising even as pupil numbers were beginning to fall.
- RW asked whether £76k overspend was largely staff/TA related and whether mapping likely absence could help with planning? TD stated it was not predictable, since 'small' unexpected issues could significantly impact the budget.
- JM and LJ highlighted Covid impact, as vaccination rates remained low in Cambridge, cases were among the highest and parents were catching Covid from their children, meaning continued caution was needed.
- RH asked about managing long term sickness and its impact. TD explained that staff shifting PT to FT had helped; agencies helping but temp staff in short supply.
- AG asked if evidence of price hiking by agencies. TD said some of this but overall shortages more important (eg Spanish staff returning home).
- DL asked about scope for shift from reactive to strategic planning. TD highlighted strategic plan embedded for maintained schools, support but also little flexibility eg. about funding sources.
- TD paid tribute to Adrian in managing cash flow so well during challenging period and to office staff and whole staff group for amazing work.

### **6. St Matthew's DfE Financial Benchmarking Exercise:**

TD introduced the paper, commenting that it was an interesting exercise but proved difficult to draw conclusions as schools have such diverse characteristics.

- LJ sought clarification about position of St M's nursery. TD noted it was one such anomaly as nursery staff were included in total staff expenses but nursery pupil numbers were not, so costs seemed relatively higher.
- RH asked why zero cost in 'finance' category? TD explained this related to loans which school did not have. Likewise 'community expenditure' covered facilities hosted by some schools (eg sports facility)

- RW asked whether higher staff costs also related to 1-1 TD working? TD agreed ; St M's unusual in level of this provision against other schools.
- RH followed up, suggesting St M's might be more supportive and accommodating to pupils with high needs. TD noted St M's have high reputation and high demand, but greater costs of supporting these high needs pupils is challenging (£6-8k more than £10.5k max available)
- JM queried whether this explained problems for special schools? TD replied true in part, because their needs so high, but also noted lack of adequate funding. Government now looks to LAs to top-slice general schools budgets to close the gap.

### **7. Review first rough-cut budget for 2022-23:**

TD explained that in spite of all efforts a first cut of the 2022-3 budget was not ready. Team have assessed expected income, which suggest increase (to £162k) but have not yet worked through the implications. Strategic decisions about the use of remaining Covid catch-up funds will come to April committee, noting reduction of £28k in these for 2022. Given higher pupil numbers on Census day hope that employment of Music teacher could continue; of clear benefit to pupils.

- CB asked about 8% pay rise demand; even if less will government pay? TD noted last round funded by government but may not continue so potential impact on finances
- RH noted that children would pay the price if not funded
- JM asked about value for money in contracts. TD flagged the role of ESPO and added value of collective purchasing.
- RW flagged energy costs especially having windows open. TD responded that school had diverse heating system including underfloor and need for fresh air carefully monitored – if required = 10 minutes in each hour.
- AG when can members view the draft budget? TD April but will email before term ends if shifts needed.
- RH When is the budget submitted? TD first week in May.

### **8. Schools Financial Value Standard, 2021-22:**

TD noted four times a year reporting to Resources committee on budget monitoring (Q3), hence initial response was 'in part'. Also 'in part' response to challenging school's proposed contracts (Q2!), because not appropriate for all given small scale of some and ESPO route.

- RH commented as chair that members could ask for budget information at any time. TD agreed as monthly monitoring always takes place but supported RH's proposal that we formalise this in some way.
- AG suggested monthly uploading of accounts? CJ suggested four to committee and two updates in between? TD flagged that Orovia facilitated feedback to governors. RH as chair to follow up with appropriate steps as all members agreed that 'Yes' would be more accurate than 'in part' as a response to Q3.
- LJ queried scrutiny of contracts and TD replied that members had challenged in the past over major contracts. TD note to RH would amplify evidence and enable 'Yes' response to Q21.
- RH suggested Q6 needed a fuller comment and evidence, which TD agreed to add.

### **9. Report from Finance Link Governor visit:**

RH flagged the report to members and thanked CJ for his link governor work.

- LJ picked up on financial literacy point. Would staff benefit from some finance training as part of professional development? TD felt generally OK but may be scope.
- CJ and CB agreed this could be useful to help understand budget facts and constraints. Some staff were not clear about why extra TDs could not be provided, for example.

**10. AOB:**

- RH wanted to thank the PTA for their incredible efforts in fundraising and support for the school and match funding for its projects. The committee as a whole fully endorsed RH's proposal to convey governors' thanks to the PTA.

**11. Date of future meeting:** 17.30 Wed 27 April.

Meeting closed 19.10