

**St Matthew's Primary School Governing Body
Resources Committee Meeting,
Wednesday 1st May 2024 at 6:00pm in School**

Present:

Chair: Chris Jagger

T Davies

S Ingersent

C Bates

D Lucarelli

R Motta

R Herbane

Linda Jones

A Aguilar: Minutes

| | Agenda item: | Time |
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| 1. | Apologies for absence Andrew Grieve sent apologies. | 6:00 |
| 2. | Declaration of direct or indirect pecuniary interests relevant to any of the Agenda items None. | 6:00 |
| 3. | Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 15 th February 2024 ACTION: Amend: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'This is year 11' should read 'year 11'. • Add Linda, who was present online. • Some sentences need tidying up for clarity. • Date: 15th February instead of 4th May. | 6:05 |
| 4. | Matters arising and agreed actions update Item 5 Environmental policy: Governors in charge reported that no precedents in other schools were found; precedent was activity-based rather than policy. Concluded that school needed to create one from first principles, which can be seen as an opportunity to focus on own interests. Ms Ingersent's role as sustainability lead was highlighted. It was decided that staff can decide what is more sensible and operationable, and could involve the school council. A governor raised the question whether StM had an allotment and the answer was that it hadn't. ACTION: School will not take forward an environmental policy, instead focusing on relevant actions as and when appropriate Item 7 SEND costs: Governors in charge are working on a link governor report. Some matters will be discussed as part of this Resources Committee meeting. | 6:10 |
| 5. | Review of March 2024 Financial Year End HT explained that the budget for the closing financial year was met with an in-year balance of ca. 20k, allowing the school to decrease the deficit. This was due to some monies owed to the school (ca. 21k) and the balance of the | 6:15 |

capital budget (ca.15k). (Normally capital shouldn't be moved to revenue, but this has been agreed due to deficit situation.) Whilst this is good news, without consideration of capital budget, the overall budget is precarious.

HT teacher explained the decreasing trajectory of meaningful capital budget, typically used for long-term building maintenance costs. Now, it is also being used for the significantly increasing IT expenditure. Capital budget and building and grounds maintenance line sometimes overlap too.

Governor asked about the training line, which had been over budget for two consequent years. HT explained that it represented a good average figure in financial benchmarking, that most training was in-house or free and that it rarely needed drawing on.

Governors asked why E27 and E28 (Bought in professional services – curriculum and other, respectively) were significantly over budget. HT explained that items are covered by multiple budget lines, hence pulling them out in the report to provide a better picture of how these items were covered.

Governor noted that there was an overspend of 24k on these items that represented a much-needed full TA salary. HT explained that main overspend is due to additional TA agency hires not budgeted, rest is little pieces here and there.

Governor asked what this overspend brought to the school provision? HT explained that it brought in TA assistance over the year as school realised children's needs.

Governors noted incorrect variance in commentary report and projected year end.

ACTION: To be checked with Finance Manager

Governor noted the consistently increasing sickness budget and expressed concern from a staff wellbeing perspective: were teachers becoming unwell because of undue workloads and levels of stress? Could this be benchmarked across schools? HT explained that school was broadly consistent with other schools when doing the financial benchmarking and noted that there has been one teacher off for longer period which is unusual. Also noted that income for absence insurance is accounted for separately. HT added that long-term cover does not represent just sickness cover, but also staff leaving, maternity leaves and emergency succession where staff have been hired via agencies; it's not necessarily reflective of long term direction.

Governor asked whether insurance cover is sufficient? HT explained that the Local Authority (LA) provided insurance cover for absences from day 11. School buying its own insurance cover was not considered financially prudent. Governor asked whether this was the most efficient way of covering absences across schools, considering that most absences were of under 10 days; national average is of 7.7 days. Governors considered that LA would have done an analysis for most cost-effective solution. HT added that costs remained within budget.

Committee thanked accountant and HT for budgeting so carefully and for clear reporting. It was acknowledged that this was not easy and that HT went above the call of duty to seek external advice and benchmark with other schools.

6.

Draft Budget for 2024/25

6:30

HT reported that the plan is positive, allowing the school to recover deficit. HT highlighted the good work done by the SENCO in optimising SEN provision under the tight budget. Regarding future years, HT also highlighted the change of government within the year, allowing the school to plan more long term thereafter. Current budget assumes consistency of circumstances, though it is hoped that an would improve schools provision. HT highlighted importance of creating a budget that LA can approve and support which is the case. Previous budget was uncertain too and school has had to make difficult decisions to meet it, but has demonstrated that it could meet it.

Governor asked why some lines were constant for five years without considering inflation and increasing cost of living? HT explained that LA can only consider budgets at current costs; changes every year meant that in practical terms budgets had to be re-agreed every year.

Governor asked why electricity was significantly higher. HT explained that school spent more on electricity because issues with heating meant that a greater amount had been used in the previous financial year to heat the school than was usual.

Governor asked why some lines were constant or only slightly increased (1-2%) when they were significantly over budget last year (and potentially previous years)? HT explained that some lines included expected savings and others were expected to even out with savings elsewhere, admitting that difficult decisions needed to be made in order to meet the deficit reduction obligation.

Governor asked why it was assumed that this year TA assistance could be hired when in previous year this had proven to be a challenge? HT admitted that this was a clear vulnerability. HT also noted that it was important to separate two budgets: long term agency budget (maternity, teacher recruitment) that is typically within budget; and the non-teaching budget that has less to do with sickness and more with additional TA need.

Governor noted that staff was always the main issue, as it represented 85% of the budget. So asked whether the new model worked and could be sustained? HT explained that school needed to work within budget and demonstrate ability to reach year end with positive balance to address the deficit. This is despite LA knowing that schools are increasingly going into deficit, nationally 1 in 8.

Governor asked whether school lettings could be exploited further. HT explained that pre-pandemic school had a single large user that provided significant and consistent income. User had moved during the pandemic and now it's difficult to attract users of this scale. Frequent, short lettings were the norm and these are difficult to manage, so not entirely cost-effective.

Chair admitted that it was a very challenging budget with significant constraints but that these constraints were a reflection of the difficult national circumstances and the agreement with the council. Under these circumstances, the chair praised the HT for working proactively to meet these constraints and attracting the LA's support.

Governor noted that other schools lost pupils due to severe constraints, which reduced the funding even further, creating a downward spiral, and noted that StM was going strong and was consistently in very high demand.

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| | APPROVED: the committee voted to recommend the budget to FGB. | |
| 7. | Next Steps re Budget Process – Deficit Licence Application Will be taken to FGB for approval. | 7:00 |
| 8. | Staffing Update Sarah Barratt has resigned from her TLR role and wishes to go back to the classroom; she has not enjoyed new role. She has been previously on TLR, but new structure hasn't worked for her. Governor noted that she has not been in the classroom for several years and asked whether there was room to allocate a class to her. HT noted that some staff was temporary so teacher could take over classes taught by temps. HT also noted that this presented an opportunity to think about how to distribute the functions/roles, and reflected on whether to find a like for like successor or redistribute roles. Noted that, while currently office was well staffed, two senior office staff were leaving in the medium term too (in addition to one long term absence due to sickness), and reflected on whether changes in the office team could lead to TLR functions, considering high level of functions of some office staff. Governor cautioned against using high salaried staff to do tasks of lower salaried staff, and encouraged HT to find a reasonable balance between the tight budget constraints and staff needs that prioritised school outcomes for the children. Committee thanked HT for delivering with such low attrition and so well for team and children. Committee reflected on whether there was room for changing the meeting times or shortening the meetings. It was agreed to keep the status quo due to external board members' working hours. | 7:10 |
| 9. | Any Other Business None. | 7:20 |
| 10. | Dates of future meetings and agreed agenda items. - | 7:30 |

Attachments:

- Minutes of Resources Committee meeting – 15th February 2024
- For Review of March 2024 Year End:
 1. SBS Budget Monitoring Report – Period 13 Year-end – Mar-24
 2. Finance Summary Report_Mar-24 - Period 13 Year End For Budget Setting:
- For Draft Budget for 2024-25:
 1. 2024-25 Draft Budget for the Resources Committee

2. Commentary Report on Draft Budget for 2024-25 and Four Year Budget Forecast