

QUEEN ELIZABETH GRAMMAR SCHOOL, PENRITH

Minutes of a meeting of the Governors' Finance and Pay Sub-Committee held on 28th February 2022 at 5.30pm held via Zoom.

Present: Miss R McMann (Governance Professional)
Mr P Airey
Mrs T Boving-Foster
Mr G Miller
Mr P Buckland
Mr J Ray (Vice Chair and Chaired the meeting)

Quorum per Terms of Reference - 4 Governors

Governors present: 5

SLT present: Mr Dawson, Mrs Scott

Visitors: none

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were accepted for Mrs Rae (work related) and Mr Worrall (family)

2. Declaration of Interest in Agenda Items

Item five relates to support staff pay and both Mrs Scott and Ms McMann are support staff. However, neither have voting rights in meetings.

3. Minutes from the meetings held in November 2021

It was unanimously agreed that the minutes are a true record. Mrs Boving-Foster will sign these when in school.

4. Matters Arising

With regards to the action points / following up from the previous minutes, Mrs Scott reported that she had taken the decision not to increase the cost for groups letting school facilities this year. This is to encourage people to come back and use facilities now that things are normalising. There are bookings for most evenings and weekends with the incentive of a lower, no VAT, rate for bookings of ten sessions or more. This is at a low cost to the school as the buildings used are outlying buildings, which means groups can access these buildings with a fob and thus, there is no need to staff them. It is forecast in the budget that lettings income will be around £13,500 for the year and the school is already a good way to meeting and exceeding this as December's accounts show income at £7,900. In pre-Covid times, lettings income has been around the £27,000 mark.

In response to questions about the last time there was a price increase and the notice needed for an increase, Mrs Scott confirmed that it has been two years since the last increase and whilst she would have to check the contract for a notice period, she felt

three months would be reasonable. Mr Buckland noted that needed to be mindful of the inevitable rise in utility costs.

To conclude it was proposed that costs should remain the same for this year and this will be re-visited in the last Finance meeting of the year (June 2022). Notice could then be given for any increase in September to come into effect from 1st January 2023. It was unanimously agreed to accept this.

Mrs Scott gave an update on the aged debtors report (relating to lettings) saying that there is £3,500 debt in the ledger. There is only one slow payer that will be chased up but historically they have always paid. Overall, Mrs Scott was pleased to report that there are very few issues.

5. Support Staff Salaries

Mrs Scott reported to the committee that there is a nationally unresolved dispute over support staff pay awards dating back to 1st April 2020. The employers have proposed a 1.75% increase versus the unions' 3%. She added that new negotiations for the next year will begin on 1st April 2022. As this is still unresolved and there appears to be no timescale for resolution, Mrs Scott proposes that a back payment is made in March's payroll to the value of 1.75%. This will be to the value of £13,000 and has already been accrued for in the accounts. Her rationale for a March payment is that she feels it is the morally right thing to make this payment, as per employers' proposals. Additionally, National Insurance contributions will go up from 1st April which is at a cost both to the employee and employer so it makes financial sense to do so before these increases. Questions and comments were as follows:

- *Although it is unlikely, there is a chance that the pay award may end up being lower than 1.75% (JR). Can produce a letter for staff to sign that should it be lower, the school has the right to make an adjustment. This is allowed under the Burgundy Book though it is a very small risk (JS).*

Mr Ray proposed to accept the 1.75% payment to support staff in March's payroll, agreeing with Mrs Scott's rationale. A vote was taken and it was unanimously agreed to accept this.

(Note: Subsequent to the meeting the Unions had agreed to the 1.75% pay increase)

6. Management Accounts to 31st December 2021

Mrs Scott reported that she is very close to finishing the January Management Accounts and feels the accounts are quite positive with the school being in a comfortable position. However, she noted four areas of concern in the accounts:

1. Recruitment costs: TES have been paid £9,500 for a 12 month service to advertise with them as opposed to a one-off cost per teaching staff advert. One-off adverts have increased in price significantly. In addition to this, £4,500 has been paid to ASCL. This is against the £9,300 in the budget for recruitment. It was noted that any support staff adverts come at a separate cost of around £600 - £700 per advert, should any vacancies arise.

2. Have had to commit a further £8,000 to careers expenditure. However, the money spent in this area this year, will pay off in future years as it means that training can be done in-house by the school's own staff.
3. Minimum wage is going up on the 1st April from £8.71 per hour to £9.50 (this is up by 6% against the 2% predicted and budgeted for). There are only 11 employees on minimum wage and this amounts to £1,000 per year.
4. Energy costs will likely rise. Both the gas and electric contract are through Cumbria County Council. The gas payments are up to date and this contract is until March 2022. However, there has been no electric bill since September 2021. The Council are aware of this and this affects other schools also. The contract for this expires in March but the current advice is to stick with what you have got.

Questions and comments were invited:

- *Do you think the £26,000 accrued for utilities will be enough (JR)?* If look back historically would hope so but it is unknown. Now that Covid restrictions are easing, things are going in the right direction as able to close windows in classrooms for example and have turned the heating down (JS).
- *Worth reviewing if we should include in prepayments any of the TES subscription at the end of the year (JR).*
- *With regards to the recruitment, not much choice as TES have changed the price structures so much (TBF).*

With regards to income, Mrs Scott was pleased to report that the school has received what she hopes to be the first of two Covid testing monies. Additionally, there is some money in the pipeline for helping with the vaccine process to the value of £1600. As QEGS did this twice, it is hoped that there will be two payments of this amount. Finally, there has been another £6,000 paid in catch-up monies and this has been spent on iPads to compliment some free iPads from the DfE. ***It was confirmed that the purchase of these iPads is an operational spend due to the value of each iPad and thus, Governor approval was not needed.***

Mr Ray queried if the testing money had any terms and conditions attached to it. Mrs Scott answered that this was not the case but would split out the expenditure in the accounts. Mr Dawson added that with regards to the iPads from the DfE these will go onto the account asset register and will keep a track of these to ensure they stay in school.

7. Bank Accounts and Cash Flow

There were no issues in the previously circulated report.

The Governors unanimously agreed that they have reviewed and are happy with the amounts held in each account.

Mrs Scott sought Governors' permission to write to NatWest bank to obtain information as to who the school's signatories are (NatWest have specifically asked to see minuted approval for her to do this). There is a mismatch in the paperwork the school holds on this and the information NatWest has. This information is needed as

soon as possible to ensure the right personnel are / become signatories. **A vote was taken and it was unanimously agreed that Mrs Scott should proceed to obtain this information from NatWest.**

8. Maintenance Report

Mrs Scott gave a verbal update noting the following works:

- Dug up and replaced fresh water pipe that leads into Sixth Form as it was previously leaking. Not only was this a health and safety issue, the water bill is on a meter.
- The last of the art huts have been taken down and SLT are starting discussions as to what to use the space for and will keep Governors updated on this as things progress.
- During half-term there has been a deep clean in the kitchen.
- New lighting has been put in the school hall.
- Planned for this term is to put in new emergency cut-off systems in the DT department to address concerns.

Questions and comments were as follows:

- *With regards to the mobiles, has there been an assessment of risk in the space that is left behind (PA)?* Yes and the area is completely fenced off. Any solution as to what to do with this space needs to be carefully thought through (JS).
- *As per the above, would suggest that this gets formally documented onto a Health and Safety document (GM).*
- *Really good to hear about the DT works as this shows good communication in reporting issues (GM).*

9. Headteacher's Update

Mr Buckland had no further updates as everything had been covered in the meeting.

10. Items for Next Agenda and Meeting Date

In the June meeting, the preferred suppliers list and lettings should be reviewed. Mr Dawson asked if he could present on the network upgrades.

The next meeting date is Monday 25th April 2022 at 5.30pm via Zoom.

The meeting closed at 6.20pm.