

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE ASSETS COMMITTEE
OF ALDERLEY EDGE COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL
ON TUESDAY 13TH FEBRUARY 2024**

GOVERNORS IN ATTENDANCE:	Lindsey Walsh (LW) Tom Williams (TWi) Martin Smith (MS) Marc Asquith (MA) Wendy Davies (WD) Hannah Lomas (HL) Mark Ross (MR) Mike Lamb (ML) Teddy Weyman (TWe)	Headteacher Chair of Committee Co-opted Governor Co-opted Governor Co-opted Governor Co-opted Governor Parent Governor Parent Governor (joined the meeting online) Co-opted Governor (joined the meeting at 5:11pm)
OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:	Sarah Lomas (SL)	Clerk to governors

MINUTES – PART ONE: NON-CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

The meeting commenced at 5:02pm.

ITEM		ACTION
1.	<p>APOLOGIES & ADDITIONAL AOB ITEMS</p> <p>There were no apologies to receive at this meeting.</p> <p>The following items of AOB were agreed to be tabled for discussion under Item 18:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School catering contract • Water rates contract 	
2.	<p>CONFLICT OF INTEREST</p> <p>The following declarations were made by governors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TWi is a Director of Neo Projects Limited. <p>There were no anticipated conflicts of interest with the business of the meeting raised by governors.</p>	
3.	<p>PART ONE MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING</p> <p>a) The Part One minutes of the previous meeting held on 07.11.23 were confirmed as a true and accurate record of proceedings. Governors approved the minutes.</p> <p>ACTION: Upload an electronically signed copy of the minutes to GVO.</p> <p>b) The action log was reviewed, and the following items were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Item 8 – A condition survey has been commissioned in relation to the school windows and ventilation issue raised by Cheshire East. • Item 13 – Both MR and ML have completed the SFVS training. Feedback on the training was poor. It was commented that the training was disorganised and not engaging for participants. 	Clerk
4.	<p>FINANCE MATTERS</p> <p>a) The latest finance meeting took place 08.02.24. The school is projected to be in a deficit (-£121,000) position from April 2025. Governors noted that additional funding is not accounted for but that this will not be sufficient to return to a balanced position.</p> <p>The school currently have 196 pupils which is a reduction of 10 and this is having an impact in terms of reduced funding with the school relying on in-year admissions. Governors noted that the school is currently at capacity for the Reception intake in September 2024.</p> <p>Governors noted that there are more funds in Squirrel Club than Cheshire East have identified.</p>	

Q: Is the school saying that the internal school figures are more accurate than those provided by Cheshire East?

A: Yes, the school have still identified a deficit but not to the level that the Local Authority have. There are items that can provide savings but these would impact curriculum provision for the pupils. Another area of potential savings is IT and a review of the contracts, hardware and software licences.

Q: Is there an estimate figure of how much needs to be saved to balance the budget?

A: The school is unable to provide this until the figures from the Local Authority are released.

Ultimately the financial situation is such that the only options to make further savings are through staffing or changes to provision for pupils. The school will also be speaking with other local headteachers who are experiencing similar issues.

TWe joined the meeting at 5:11pm.

Governors noted that historically, only 5% of schools were in a deficit position but this has now risen to 40%.

Governor Comment: The benchmarking costs were interesting as it could be seen how the premises costs skew the overall benchmarking results. The old building is attractive in one way but due to the lack of maintenance is proving to be a burden. It has to be questioned why the school should have to make savings which impact provision for pupils because of an ageing asset that is not being maintained by the Local Authority.

Governor Comment: Submission of a deficit budget should be considered because the situation is worsening, and the Local Authority need to see that this cannot continue and they need to maintain the building.

Governor Comment: The danger with submission of a deficit is that the Local Authority take control of the finances and make decisions to take away provision that the school want to keep.

Q: What was the deficit position this time last year?

A: It was significantly less and continues to grow year on year.

Governors agreed that a balanced budget could not be set at this time due to the information outstanding from the Local Authority but that it was felt that a deficit budget would be the only option and a notice of failure to submit a balanced budget would need to be considered at the FGB meeting on 07.03.24.

ACTION: Add consideration of draft budget to the FGB on 07.03.24.

Governors noted that there is a waiting list for the after school provision at Squirrel Club but the numbers are not high enough to financially support an additional member of staff.

b) The benchmarking data had been circulated to governors on GVO for review.

It was noted that the school are below average in terms of expenditure in all areas except for the MUGA pitch but yet are significantly over budget which, governors commented, does not make sense.

It was confirmed that the school have a revenue deficit compared to other schools who do not. There has always been a legacy relating to SEND which consumes the reserves available. Ideally, the Board should be increasing the reserves available to the school over time but this has not been possible for almost 20 years.

Clerk

	<p>Q: Why has it not been possible to increase the reserves? If the MUGA is taken out of the equation, the school is spending efficiently in all other areas according to the benchmarking data?</p> <p>A: It is not known why this is happening. The building is very inefficient in terms of heat and utilities but this is not identified on the benchmarking data. The school are not undertaking any non-essential repairs at this time.</p> <p>Governors were informed that two condition surveys have been commissioned. One is to be undertaken by the Local Authority and the Department for Education will undertake a survey in May 2024.</p> <p>Q: What could the outcome of these surveys be?</p> <p>A: It may result in new windows which should be funded by the Local Authority.</p> <p>Governor Comment: The benchmarking data appears reassuring but does not identify areas where the school can make savings.</p> <p>Q: What percentage of the costs relate to the MUGA?</p> <p>A: This would need to be quantified.</p> <p>ACTION: Ascertain the percentage of the costs apportioned to the MUGA.</p> <p>In terms of education consultancy costs, it is not possible to quantify the differences between schools.</p> <p>c) The staffing structure of the school was considered and there were no changes proposed. The school have 7 classes and require 7 full time members of teaching staff. This is one of the challenges and highest costs to the school.</p> <p>ACTION: Add consideration of the staffing structure to the FGB agenda following receipt of the additional finance information from the Local Authority.</p> <p>d) The following items had been circulated to governors for review prior to the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Continuity Plan (BCP) – on GVO approved. • Asset Register – Governors noted that TWi has reviewed the assets register and spot checks have been undertaken with no issues identified. <p>Governors approved the Business Continuity Plan and the Assets Register.</p> <p>e) The SFVS is underway with a final draft nearing completion. There have been some areas of confusion with regard to setting a balanced budget which will be clarified once the additional financial information is available, and a formal decision made on the failure to submit a balanced budget.</p> <p>It was suggested that due to the timeframes, all areas that can be completed are done so ahead of the FGB with those outstanding to be completed following the FGB with the detail of the steps taken to make decisions included. It was confirmed that TWi and MR are completing the majority of the finance sections within the SFVS. It was emphasised that all evidence points need to be updated.</p> <p>It was agreed that a final draft of the SFVS would be made available for the FGB.</p> <p>f) There were no changes to the Manual of Internal Financial Procedures (MIFP) requiring approval at this meeting.</p>	<p>LW</p> <p>Clerk</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>RISK REGISTER</p> <p>The risk register has been reviewed by LW and HL with two areas amended to reduce the risk level. The governance risk has been reduced from moderate to low now new governors have gained experience and training. The finance issues have been identified as high risk.</p> <p>Q: Is HL reviewing the risk register termly?</p> <p>A: An annual update has been planned.</p>	<p>LW</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>WEBSITE COMPLIANCE REPORT</p> <p>The website has been reviewed internally by the School Bursar and judged to be compliant. It was confirmed that the publication of admissions arrangements for 2024-25 are on the school website.</p>	

	<p>Q: How often is the school website reviewed? A: Annually but a member of the Governing Board should undertake this. ACTION: Ask KB to undertake a review of the school website.</p>	WD
7.	<p>BUILDINGS TWi has met with the school site manager and discussed items of concern including the school fencing. The school is anticipating that Cheshire East will fund any works to the fencing to increase the height as this was identified within the Local Authority report.</p> <p>A new issue has arisen in relation to the new boiler. This work was undertaken by contractors employed by Cheshire East but significant air locks have been identified which is affecting the system. Cheshire East are not taking responsibility for the faults identified and claiming that the issue was not in the original specification of works.</p> <p>Q: Will Cheshire East cover the cost of works to remedy the problem? A: No. The school can use Devolved Formula Capital funding for these works.</p> <p>Governors noted that the roof repairs have resolved the flooding issues.</p> <p>United Utilities claim to have resolved the foul sewage flooding issues but the school do not believe this is a long term solution and will continue to monitor this.</p> <p>Mould has been identified in an area of the school that is not used as a formal classroom. Dehumidifiers have been installed which has improved the situation, but mould is still present.</p>	
8.	<p>DEBT WRITE OFF Governors were informed that there were no new debts to report. Outstanding monies continue to be followed up in line with procedures including one where the pupil has left the school.</p>	
9.	<p>SQUIRREL CLUB Governors noted that charging arrangements for Squirrel Club were not due to be reviewed until next year however, the terms and conditions do require updating.</p> <p>The school are proposing a change to the notice period to cancel holiday club sessions from one week's notice to two week's notice following issues with short notice cancellations at holiday club sessions.</p> <p>Q: Is there a difference between holiday club and after school club in terms of when payment is due? A: There is not currently but this could applied.</p> <p>Governor Comment: Terms and conditions could be amended to require payment for holiday club sessions to be paid upon booking and a cancellation clause with reduced funds to be returned based on set timescales.</p> <p>Governors approved the proposed changed to the Squirrel Club terms and conditions.</p>	
10.	<p>INVENTORY Q: Was there any second hand value to the interactive whiteboards and projectors that were written off? A: No.</p>	
11.	<p>GOVERNOR TRAINING Governors are continuing to engage with training. The MAT meeting with the SIP is planned for 28.02.24 and the IDSR data training is planned to follow on from the FGB on 07.03.24.</p>	
12.	<p>POLICIES The following policies were circulated for review prior to the meeting:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 83. Policy for managing the capability of teachers 76. Internet access 99. Organisational Change 	

	<p>d) 66. Teacher Appraisal e) 54. Pay Policy for Support Staff f) 100. Pension Discretions g) 105. Leave and Time Off h) 101. Social Media for School Community i) 104. Wheelchair Use j) 98. Equality and Diversity k) 26. Lettings</p> <p>The school confirmed that any comments regarding formatting have been undertaken. There are no fundamental changes to the policies proposed.</p> <p>Governors approved the above-listed policies.</p>	
13.	<p>STAFFING It was confirmed that the staff workload survey has been completed and the analysis of the results will be undertaken over February half term.</p> <p>Governors noted that the school will be working to incorporate DfE tasks that teaching staff should not be undertaking which largely relate to the administration of planning school trips.</p>	
14.	<p>SCHOOL RESIDENTIAL VISITS All arrangements for residential trips including risk assessments are underway.</p> <p>There are no planned changes to the process for arranging trips and the same locations are being used. Parent meetings have been held. All three residential trips require approval from the Local Authority.</p>	
15.	<p>DIRECTOR'S REPORT Governors were briefed on relevant items from the Director's Report spring 2024, to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ofsted Inspection Handbook updates • Workload for teachers • Workload for governors • Academy Conversion charges and timescales The school may be able to claim a new grant based on the fact that it was not the school's fault that the academy conversion collapsed. <p>Q: Does the fact that the school is in a deficit position affect the attractiveness of the school to a Trust? A: Potentially, yes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Funding Update • Updated HR policies • Recruitment of Religious Education advisors • Internal audit – Governors noted that the report highlights issues on SFVS completion and exit interviews not being undertaken. The school confirmed that exit interviews do take place upon staff leaving. 	
16.	<p>TO NOTE ARRANGEMENTS FOR PRODUCTION OF MEETING PRECIS ACTION: TWi to complete the meeting precis.</p>	TWi
17.	<p>MEETINGS The next meeting date was confirmed as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuesday 14th May 2024 at 5:00pm. 	
18.	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS School Meals Contract – Governors were informed that a decision is due today on whether Local Authority catering provision will cease at the end of the academic year. The school confirmed that they anticipate that the decision will be to cease the service and therefore the school need to source an alternative provider. The East Cheshire Association of Primary Headteachers (ECAPH) is holding a conference on 08.03.24 to discuss school meal provider options and the potential of a joint contract. However, having discussed this option with Dolce (an alternative catering provider), they have communicated that this would not yield savings as provision would be calculated on a per school basis.</p>	

	<p>Governors noted that the school may be required to pay up to £5,000 set up costs to a new provider and there are currently no funds available for this.</p> <p>Q: Will Cheshire East still provide funding for free school meals? A: Cheshire East do not provide this funding. This is received from central government and will continue.</p> <p>It was noted that there is the potential to increase the price per meal.</p> <p>Q: Could the school undertake a temperature check to ascertain what is reasonable for parents to pay? A: If an external provider is used, then the provider sets the meal prices and the school is not involved.</p> <p>Governor Comment: The take up of school meals did not reduce when the previous price increase was applied.</p> <p>Governors noted that the school will be financially impacted because it will have to absorb servicing costs which were previously covered by Cheshire East.</p> <p>Governor Comment: It is situations such as this that make being part of MAT an attractive prospect because this would be centrally delivered.</p> <p>Cheshire East have also withdrawn from a school contract for water utilities provision and schools now have to source their own individual contracts. The School Bursar has undertaken a review of options and has recommended that the school remain with Wave for a 60 month contract based on current water use over the last 6 months.</p> <p>Q: Is there another quote to compare with? A: Yes. Governors would be welcome to undertake a deep dive into this area.</p>	
19.	<p>IMPACT STATEMENT</p> <p>Governors helped to move the school forward in the following ways during this meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors challenged the proposed financial savings in the best interests of pupils with an action taken to decide on the failure to submit a balanced budget to be taken at the FGB meeting on 07.03.24. • Safeguarding was discussed in relation to health and safety items and accidents and incidents with reassurance sought on the processes followed. • A number of policies were reviewed and approved. • Benchmarking data was discussed with queries raised as to anomalies and the reasons for reduced reserves. 	

The meeting moved to Part Two.

.....Chair

.....17.06.24.....Date