

ST MARTIN'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOLS

Local Governing Body – Minutes of Meeting held on 13th May2024 at 5.00 pm on Microsoft Teams

Governors present:

Mrs M Down (MD)
Mrs A Keith (AK)
Ms R Squizzoni (RS)
Mrs J Taylor (JT)
Mrs A Todd (AT)

In attendance:

Mrs T Jones (TJ) Clerk to the Governors
Mrs Z Lever (ZL) ELT Chief Finance Officer (to 5.50 pm)

* The Co-Headteachers (Mrs M Down and Mrs K Marchesi) share the role of Headteacher governor but count once towards a quorum and have a single vote where the Local Governing Body needs to vote on a matter.

Apologies for absence

1. Apologies for absence from this meeting had been received from Revd N Parish, Ms E Smit and Mr A Holliman. Dr L Wang did not attend. The meeting was in quorum.

Declarations of Interest and confidentiality

2. No governors declared interests in the agenda items for this meeting. TJ underlined the confidentiality of governor discussions and each governor declared that they were joining the meeting from a secure and confidential location.

Chairs Actions

3. JT reported that there had been no decisions or emergency actions taken since the last LGB meeting.

Finance and budget

4. Governors had received the St Martin's 2024-25 Draft revenue budget report V1 as at April 2024 and the March 2024 management accounts. ZL apologised that there was no commentary to the FMR on this occasion but would produce a commentary for the April FMR, which was due to be provided in the week of 20 May 2024.
5. ZL highlighted the forecast year end deficit shown in the current FMR of £58k, and reasons for the slight change since February, which was largely due to the five year fixed wire testing due in July 2024 (and removed from the 2024-25 budget). Some additional lettings income had been achieved and there were small changes in staffing.
6. AT asked whether the achievement of additional lettings income indicated there was an opportunity to grow this further; ZL said that the change related to some incremental lettings and an updated forecast but this could be a source for more income and this had been reflected in the 2024-25 budget. The annual hire charge to Club Vale was due to be increased in line with CPI and would be included in version 2 of the draft budget. ZL commended the School on its healthy lettings business, supported by the fact that the site was well maintained and attractive which was credit to the Site Team.
7. AT asked about the resolution of the query on EHCP funding; Governors received assurance that the matter had been actioned as noted previously. MD confirmed that staff had been in discussion with Surrey and received some of the income, although there was still a shortfall. The impact would be shown in the April FMR. ZL would include an update on this in the commentary to the April FMR.

Action: ZL

8. ZL reported that the Surrey pay offer had been rejected earlier this term and the final offer expected would have a small impact in this financial year and a bigger effect on the 2024-25 budget.
9. ZL said that St Martin's had worked extremely hard to bring the deficit down and the results were a credit to the Co-Head teachers and the staff team. MD commented on the support in this from the Trust Finance team.

10. No further questions were raised on the March FMR. Governors noted the position. AK said that the close management of the budget was clear and yielding results and thanked staff for their efforts.

Draft Budget v1 2024-25

11. ZL highlighted significant change between the February /March starting point for development of the budget and the current position shown. The Co-Head teachers had taken on board and addressed many of the challenges presented at this time, working together with the ELT team. As a result the current draft showed a deficit of £28k (against the draft budget position in November of £175k).
12. ZL highlighted the assumptions made and key drivers for the 2024-25 budget, as outlined in the Draft budget report.
13. AT asked what leaders' views were on the forecast costs for agency staff and whether this area needed review given current staffing challenges; MD said that these costs were very dependent on external factors, such as staff sickness and absence and St Martin's would be particularly vulnerable to this given rationalisation of staffing. One approach to support capacity was to ask 'agency' staff who were familiar with St Martin's to increase their work St Martin's.
14. ZL said that it was important to ensure that the reduction in teaching staff FTE by 0.8, which provided savings to the School, did not compromise educational provision.
15. ZL reported the reduction in the utilities budget and that she had been assured that prices for utilities had been fixed. However, a contingency of £10k had been included in the budget, which might be released for other areas if not required for utilities.
16. Governors welcomed the reduced partnership fee (reduced to 6.6% from 8.2%) following The Priory joining ELT and AT sought clarification of the figure; ZL said that the academy benchmarking report indicated that 7.4% was an appropriate partnership fee for small trusts and that ELT was keeping central costs as low as possible to support the budgets of member schools.
17. ZL highlighted for discussion concern regarding the number on roll and staffing as a percentage of income.

Number on roll

18. AT sought clarification of how the figures for acceptances and offers compared with offers in a normal year; 72 acceptances had been received, 69 of which had placed St Martin's as their first choice of school, and the school had now offered 74 places. JT noted that falling rolls in the locality were affecting all schools, but the shrinking pool of children had a particular impact through increasing the reach of the area within which offers could be made, to include areas where other schools with nursery provisions were located. The fact that a school ran a day nursery often impacted their choice of primary school. AK suggested that it would be useful to speak to St Martin's Pre-school regarding their numbers and to look into the number of siblings; MD would analyse siblings, geography and feedback from parents who had accepted places for September. **Action: MD**
19. AT asked whether this position was reflected at other schools; although the reduction in school age pupils had been forecast, it appeared that numbers at St Martin's were significantly lower, which had never been seen previously at this school. ZL said that each place was worth £3700 and the budget was based on 80, but 2024-25 funding would be significantly lower if only 72 places were accepted. It was important to understand if this was a one-off issue or a trend and to adapt the measures required to address the situation accordingly.
20. AT asked when it would be possible to review the position again and MD said that gathering feedback from new parents would inevitably be delayed until they joined, although there could be a chance to start this at the transition evening this term. However, it was also important to understand why parents had chosen for example Stamford Green instead of St Martin's. AK said it would be interesting to understand the make-up of the cohort, and whether, for example, the high proportion of EAL pupils had an impact on choices made by communities. MD said that it was possible that some parents had not chosen St Martin's because of its inclusive school ethos and would keep governors informed of developments. **Action: MD**

Staffing as a percentage of income.

21. ZL highlighted analysis in the paper of staffing (including teaching staff agency) expressed as a percentage of both GAG (+other national funding formula grants) income and also as percentage of total expenditure. ZL explained the assumptions made when developing the staffing budget for 2024-25 and noted that no funding increases had yet been shown. It was hoped that the Government might provide a pay grant to contribute to staffing costs but there was no indication to date that this would materialise. No guidance had been received from the Government or National Academy of Multi-Academy Trusts as to the appropriate percentages

to include in this year's budgets, but Surrey had given guidance to maintained schools for an uplift of 5%. It was noted that 5% was not considered to be affordable to the trust ELT had chosen to apply a percentage increase of 3.5%. Discussion with other finance leads appeared to be in line.

Next steps and governor questions

22. MD, ZL and EP would meet on 16 May 2024 to further review the position. MD reported a new approach to curriculum budgets which would deliver even tighter control during 2024-25.
23. In a pre-submitted question, AT had sought clarification of the comment that some funding was being rolled into the NFF and the anticipated impact of this; the national funding formula now included grants such as the mainstream additional grant (MSAG), 23/24 £93k, and the Teachers pay award grant (TPAG) would be added to NFF from Sept 25, in 24/25 this would be £48k. From September 2024, COVID grants (tutoring grant and recovery grant), would no longer be in place. Budgeting pay was a challenge for all school leaders.
24. AT asked when schools were likely to receive information on the pay increases; ZL said that there had been no announcements about this but the date for the Trust to submit the budget return had been delayed to the end of August.
25. Governors' pre-submitted questions and responses to these are provided as appendix 1. JT thanked ZL for the comprehensive report and detailed explanations and responses provided. ZL invited governors to message her with any further questions after the meeting.
26. The next iteration of the budget would be seen by governors at their June meeting and governors would be asked to review the next version for recommendation to the Trust Board for approval.

Feedback from the meeting of staff with members of the ELT Operations Team

27. JT reported that the meeting for St Martin's staff with members of the ELT Operations Team had been well attended and received and thanked the Trust for the honesty evident in their responses to questions from the School. JT said that if the school was to face a financially challenging financial year, it would be helpful to have a similar meeting early in the autumn term and put into context the global situation being experienced by all schools. ZL agreed that it was important to understand the national landscape and that the financial situation at St Martin's and resulting decisions were not a consequence of being a member of the Trust and the barriers to growth it had faced, but from factors beyond the school's control. RS confirmed the importance of putting across this message to staff. ZL would take this feedback to the Trust.

ZL left the meeting at this point.

Verbal report from the Co-Head teacher

28. MD reported that SATS had started on 13 May 2024 and assured governors regarding the required procedures and security measures in place for conducting the tests. Governors were informed of the rigorous measures to preserve the confidentiality of the papers and isolation required to enable one child to take the tests following their return from attendance at a one-off event which coincided with day 1 of the SATs but was important to the child's heritage.

Update on Governor recruitment

29. TJ reported that St Martin's Church and Christ Church were publishing the notice to raise awareness of opportunities to join the LGB as Foundation appointed Governors to fill the two PCC appointed vacancies and the one Diocesan appointed vacancy. To support this AK volunteered to raise the opportunity with members of the congregation when she was in church on Sunday 19 May. **Action: AK**
30. Details had been sent to one individual who had expressed interest and he had been invited to meet with JT, TJ or another governor.
31. It had been agreed to run a parent governor election for during half term 2 with a view to filling two forthcoming vacancies (arising 31 July and 6 October). TJ had alerted two parents who had previously shown interest by email to look out for the election but no response had to date been received. AK said she would follow up with one of the interested parents. **Action: AK**
32. The applications for appointment or re-appointment to Diocesan appointed Foundation governor vacancies which would arise in October 2024 would be progressed in the second half of the summer term. **Action: TJ**

Date of next meeting

33. The next meeting of the Local Governing Body scheduled for Thursday 27 June 2024 at 5.00 pm.

Evaluation of meeting

34. The LGB noted that keeping the children at St Martin’s central to discussions was evident during this meeting. Ensuring that decisions did not have a negative impact on the education provision at the School had been noted as key. Governors welcomed evidence of the team approach from School and Trust leaders as they worked to support the School through the challenging times, and evidence from the positive impact on the current year’s deficit. JT commented on the importance of sensitivity in governors’ approaches to staff and supporting the wellbeing of staff as they faced the current challenges. The meeting closed at 6.05 pm.

Signed.....Chair Date.....