

CHELMSFORD COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Minutes of a meeting of the FACILITIES & FINANCE COMMITTEE held in the School & via Microsoft Teams at 7.45am on Wednesday 7th February 2024

Present:	Richard Brown Stephen Lawlor Margaret Cousins Niamh Dobson Stephen Miles Mary Argent	Chair (via Teams) Headteacher Vice Chair Associate Member (via Teams)
In Attendance:	Melissa Mulgrew Wendy Newton	Business Manager Clerk to Governors

ITEM 1 – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1. There were no apologies for absence, all Committee members were present.

ITEM 2 - DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

2. There were no declarations of business interest further to those already stated on the Register of Business Interests for 2023-24, conflicts of interest or receipts of gifts or hospitality.

ITEM 3 - MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

3. The minutes of the Facilities & Finance Committee meeting held on 15th November 2023 were **approved** as a true record.

ITEM 4 - MATTERS ARISING

4. Item 4, Para 15 – Site Visit. The site visit by the Chair had not yet taken place and the Clerk agreed to liaise with the Site Manager to arrange a mutually convenient date.
5. Item 7, Para 7 – Art Lift - **Decision**. Quotes had been received for the repair of the Art Lift just prior to the recent Ofsted visit but had not yet been reviewed in full. The quotes varied from £21,000 to £71,000, ranging from repair only to full replacement, and were now to be studied for best value for money. The Committee discussed the issue and noted that any expenditure would be required to come from School reserves. The Business Manager **agreed** to send a recommendation for the Art Lift to the Committee by email.
6. Item 7, Para 10 – Savings Account. It was confirmed that the School's savings account had been moved to Lloyds Bank as agreed.

ITEM 5 – CHAIR'S ACTION

7. There had been no Chair's Action since the last meeting other than routine financial expenditure authorisations within his agreed remit.

ITEM 6 – FINANCIAL UPDATE

8. The Financial Management Reports for Month 2 (October 2023) were reviewed. The Business Manager advised that as expected finances were tight but that it was hoped that a break-even figure could be reached by the end of the financial year. It was stressed that the variances to budget were a result of changes to Government funding after the School Budget had been agreed in July 2023; these variances would continue for the rest of the year. There were the usual trips variances relating to income and expenditure timings and no other major financial items to note at present. Finances were being watched extremely closely with money being clawed back whenever possible. It was expected to be a financially challenging year.

ACTION

Clerk

M Mulgrew

9. Governors queried the impact of the staff pay awards which had been finalised last term and were advised that there had been a £180,000 negative impact from the pension increase effective from 1st April. Grant funding towards the teachers' award was not yet known but likely to result in a £30,000 shortfall which would have to be covered by the School. The deficit funding was discussed and noted by the Committee. The Pay Grant had only covered about 1 to 1.5% of the 6.5% increment awarded to teachers. No information had been received on 2024-25 funding other than the minimum funding guarantee for Main School funding. A £12,000 premises variance shown in the financial management report was queried, it related to premises contracts being paid at the start of the year and would lessen during the year. The Chair noted that there was no flexibility in the 2023-24 budget as it had not been possible to allocate the usual £30-£40,000 contingency figure this year. The balance sheet and cashflow forecast were reviewed and it was noted that there were no liquidity problems. The Committee recognised that the School reserves, deemed the result of having been very prudent financially in the past, gave the School a buffer for a couple of years.

10. Audit Responsibilities (Reported during Item 11). The Business Manager advised that the first Juniper Internal Scrutiny audit on financial controls had been due to take place that day. However, having received the pre-visit documentation from the School, Juniper had advised that no on-site audit was required as everything was in order. Governors would receive the Juniper audit report in due course.

ITEM 7 – CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT

11. The main campus development issues were currently the swimming pool and a new Government requirement for the School to have a climate action plan and a sustainability development lead in place by 2025. The swimming pool continues to be a problem with weekly maintenance issues sometimes resulting in the need to close the pool and cancel lettings. The lack of parental engagement with the swimming pool fundraising project was also a major concern. The gas contract for the swimming pool complex comes up for renewal in September 2024 and, at current gas rates, costs were likely to triple from £9,000 to £30,000 per year on a new contract. Such an increase could not be covered by raising the lettings fees as this would lose hirers and also affect the VAT issue, which would take us over the VAT limit and require us to become registered, which in itself pushes hire charges up for all hirers and creates additional administration. Other power options, particularly solar energy, were being investigated by the School and were discussed by the Committee. It was suggested that lack of engagement in fundraising and the increasing energy costs put a different slant on the whole swimming pool issue and whether having a swimming pool facility was sustainable.

12. PCH, the School's project managers, were currently putting together a campus strategy document which would be used towards future funding bids. The School could potentially put in an urgent capital support grant from the Government, but a full case would be required for the pool. If the business case to save the pool was viable, the lack of engagement with fundraising would need to be addressed. The Committee discussed alternative energy options and in particular solar energy and the need for electricity storage using batteries across the whole campus but with the pool as a priority. Four solar energy companies had already been contacted by the school. The Business Manager also advised that there may be a chance to get a CIF grant for the Art Block windows but that the CIF bid for the Main School boiler replacement was unlikely to succeed. A new energy strategy was required for the whole school campus and the Committee discussed the possible solar energy options. A couple of companies had been contacted to discuss using LED lighting with built-in sensors as another way of saving energy. As part of the sustainability commitment, the School would be required to have a Sustainability Link Governor as well as a Sustainability Development Lead within the School, which was most likely to be the Business Manager. It was confirmed that the Government was setting up sustainability hubs around the country which for CCHS would be at the University of East Anglia. It was suggested that Sustainability should be added to the Facility & Finance Committee's agenda as a standing item in the future.

ITEM 8 – SITE TEAM REPORT

13. A Site Team Report dated Spring 2024 was received for information. The Business Manager reported that the Site Team was continuing to do a marvellous job and that the Site Manager was

always looking for ways to cut costs. It was noted that the large amount of practical and repair work undertaken by the Team saved the School a lot of money. The Site Team Manager had also recently given significant input to the next CIF bids and the swimming pool strategy. Comments in the Report relating to the Site Team being under strain were queried and it was stated that whilst their workload had increased with having a bigger campus and more students, staffing had also increased to assist the issue. There had been several unexpected equipment failures on site since the start of the academic year which had caused additional stress to the Team. The problems relating to the School's ageing boiler system and the financial constraints of keeping within the premises budget were also adding to ongoing pressures.

ITEM 9 – IT & CYBER SECURITY UPDATE

14. An IT Update report dated January 2024 was received and discussed. The School was working through a DfE Cyber Secure assessment programme which was an in-depth analysis of the School's cyber security. Nine of the fifteen elements had been completed to date and the School had achieved level 3 (the expected level) or above, and 93% of the fifteen completed elements had scored above the national average. Governors commended the School's achievement in the elements already undertaken. The School continued to receive daily cyber-attacks but had a secure malware system in place. There were over 2,000 failed attempts to log into the School's IT system per day, and 2-3 times a week there were attacks purporting to be from other schools or known contacts which were the hardest to identify. Staff were alert to such phishing attempts and any new trends were advertised to staff.

15. The Business Manager presented a smartboard proposal for Governor consideration. As part of the whole school smartboard roll-out and in order to benefit from economies of scale, a request for additional funding of £8,000 was put forward to cover the cost of an additional five smartboards to be installed at the same time as those already authorised. The Committee put forward questions about the purchase, the quoting system and the School's actual need for the smartboards, and additional clarification was received from the Business Manager and Headteacher.

16. **Decision.** It was **agreed** that the sum of up to £8,000 could be used from School reserves for an additional five smartboards.

M Mulgrew

ITEM 10 – HEALTH & SAFETY

17. The minutes of the Health & Safety (H&S) Committee meeting held on 17th October 2023 were reviewed. It was reported that H&S at the School was relatively quiet. The School was robust with incident reporting and all incidents were logged. The School's First Aid Policy had been updated to reflect new procedure changes relating to dizziness and details were received.

ITEM 11 – RISK REGISTER

18. **Decision.** The Facilities, Finance and Capital Development sections of the CCHS Risk Register were reviewed. Minor administrative revisions were put forward for Risks F35 and F53, and the Clerk **agreed** to amend the document as agreed by the Committee. With the agreed amendment, the Facilities, Finance and Capital Development sections of the CCHS Risk Register were approved.

Clerk

ITEM 12 – GDPR UPDATE

19. The Business Manager advised that GDPR issues were quiet and that there had been no data breaches. The School had been a party to a breach by ECC Social Services which had been logged by CCHS and reported to the Essex Information Governance Service. There had been some random Freedom of Information requests relating to student ethnicity and citizenship, and further requests were to be expected after 1st March when the Year 7 Entrance Test results were published.

20. The Headteacher brought to the attention of the Committee recent national press items about the Labour Party's proposal relating to VAT and private schools, and it was noted that it may have an impact on grammar schools. It was possible that this issue may lead to further Freedom of Information enquiries. The Committee were also informed of a newspaper article by the Director of

the Sutton Trust referring to grammar schools and social mobility. It was stated that CCHS was ahead of many other grammar schools in this field and the issue was discussed.

ACTION

ITEM 13 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

21. **Ofsted Inspection.** The meeting was advised that the final report of the Ofsted inspection undertaken on 23rd & 24th January 2024 had now been received and the School had achieved 'Outstanding' in all categories. The report was glowing and full of compliments. Governors congratulated the Headteacher and the whole School for a well-deserved result. The Clerk **agreed** to send the Ofsted report out to the Full Governing Body later that day.

Clerk

ITEM 14 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING

22. **Decision.** It was **agreed** that the next meeting would be held at 8.00am on Wednesday 24th April 2024.

All

The meeting closed at 8.57am.

R Brown, Chair

Date: 24th April 2024